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Warrior

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THE GOVERNOR OF KATTOWITZ

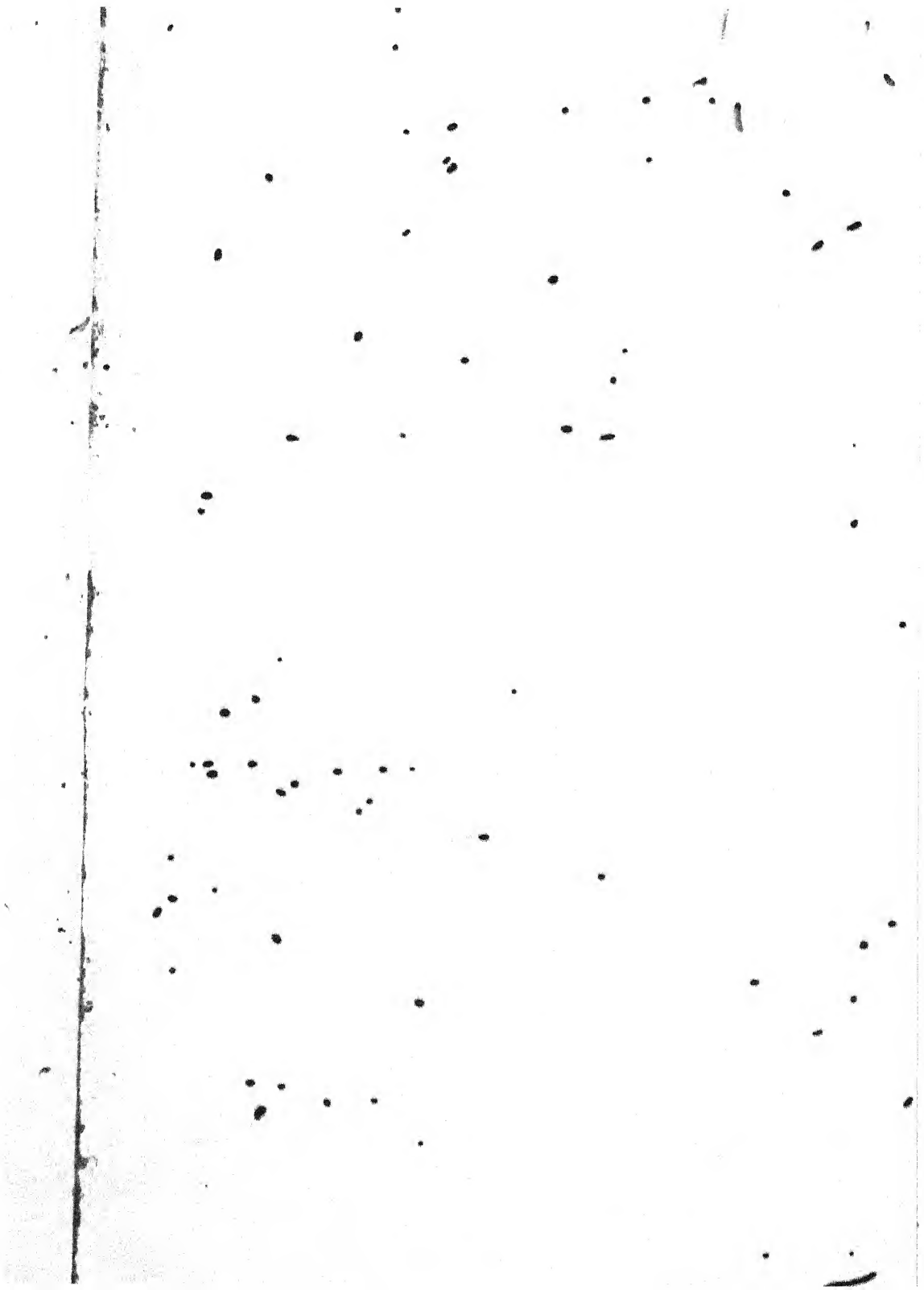
COLONEL GRANT'S TO-MORROW

THE THIRTY-THIRD DIVISION IN FRANCE
AND FLANDERS, 1915-1919

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"THE THINKER ON THE BUTTE DE WARLENCOURT"
From the painting by Sir William Orpen, R.A.

Warrior

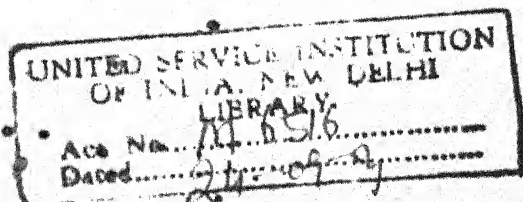
by

LIEUT.-COLONEL GRAHAM
SETON HUTCHISON, D.S.O., M.C.

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THE QUALITIES OF
COURAGE, PATIENCE, ENDURANCE,
LOYALTY, SACRIFICE
THESE ARE THEY OF THE
COMRADESHIP OF WARRIORS.

TO THOSE POSSESSED OF THE
WARRIOR'S HEART
THIS WORK IS DEDICATED



Foreword

No easy hopes or lies
Shall bring us to our goal;
But iron sacrifice
Of body, will, and soul.
There is but one task for all—
For each one life to give.
Who stands if freedom fall?
Who dies if England live?¹

THE canvas of War is immense. Upon it is painted all history, the rise and fall of Empires, the evolution of cultures and religions. Science and invention fall in the background of geographical discovery and world knowledge. With each succeeding era has the canvas grown both in size and in the complexity of its pattern.

But always as the motif have been the peoples of the earth, first primitive tribes in their nakedness warring with staves and sharpened flints, then nations armed with pikes and cumbrous muzzle-loading guns. Finally Mars laid his brush aside, the foreground filled with all the faces of the world, allied against each other in the combat, grotesquely clad, bodies screened with armour, hideous masques covering the head, weapons belching flame and poisonous gas, throwing vast bombs and shells, the killing of the unseen by the unknown.

There remains in the foreground the portrait of the Warrior himself, his physique and character, his training and his weapons, his habits and his customs, his hopes and fears, the man who fought the battle of the nations.

The World War, which between August 1914 and November 1918 changed the history of civilization, and reoriented political geography and economy, was fought by men. Sometimes, though millions perished in the battlefield, we, even after so short a space, are apt to overlook this fact. The science of war, its organization and administration, its statecraft, strategy and

¹ From "For all we have and are," by Rudyard Kipling.

tactics, are sterile and inoperative without the will and hands of man.

The Warrior is the central fact of war. So long as war remains, the ultimate in argument, the final act in the imposition of will or of resistance, the Warrior, man himself, is the pivot around which the huge array of modern warfare turns and sways.

Though there may be sporadic outbreaks of conflict upon the edges of civilization, no new combat can be other than that patterned by the war of Allies which opened the twentieth century. The history of that war with all its influences and reverberations, political, financial, ethnographical, has been written and re-written. Historians, propagandists and apologists, reporters, critics and diarists, dramatists and poets, novelists,—it is literally true that thousands armed with the pen have re-fought the battles of the world.

I am not concerned in this record with publications either from Allied nationals or from those who were our enemies. They possess their own peculiar outlook. Nor am I interested in statecraft, strategy, or tactics, except in so far as the latter moved the Warrior from place to place in the battlefield, sent him "over the top," or back into rest billets. The background of the war canvas has been adequately filled by those of experience, and therefore competent to write. My concern alone is with the British soldier, the Warrior, the man in the foreground of the picture.

Though the British soldier fought the battles of the World War in South-West and in East Africa, in Arabia and in Palestine, in the Balkans and in Italy, in Turkey, Persia, and in the Cameroons, it was on the Western Front, in Flanders and in Picardy, that his feats of arms, and not least the imprint of his character, will remain indelibly marked upon the history of his race and upon that of all civilization.

The story of the Warrior, too, has been written in the records of units and formations;¹ in the personal diaries,² narratives and published letters of many men. There is, too, the truth in

¹ Recommended: *History of the Guards Division in the Great War*, by Cuthbert Headlam. *The Irish Guards in the Great War*, by Rudyard Kipling. *The 8th Division in War*, by Lieut.-Colonel J. H. Boraston and Capt. C. E. O. Bax. *The 18th Division in the Great War*, by Captain G. H. F. Nicholls. *History of the 36th Division*, by Captain Cyril Falls. *The Worcestershire Regiment in the Great War*, by Captain H. FitzM. Stacke, M.C. *History of the Black Watch in the Great War*, by Major-General A. G. Wauchope. *Die Württemberger im Weltkrieg*, by General von Moser. *Das Königlich Bayerische Infanterie Leibregiment*, edited by officers of the Regiment.

² *Undertones of War*, by Edmund Blunden. *Her Privates We*, by Private 19022. *The Weary Road*, by Charles Douie. *The Storm of Steel*, by Ernst Jünger.

fiction.¹ But, as is reasonable to expect, these are often coloured with sympathy or antipathy, by just pride or resentment at injustice. Moreover there is not, I believe, one such record which within itself covers the whole Western Front, with its familiarities of landscape and of name, so often such insignificant landmarks as the Butte de Warlencourt or Fosse 8. Nor is there one which embraces, as personal experience, the whole period of the War from the days of the "Contemptible Little Army" in 1914, to the vast military machine which blew the bugles of an Armistice in November 1918.

It is the purpose of this volume to tell the story of the Warrior, in order that the part which man, the Briton, played from the beginning to the end shall be known to history. I do not discount for a moment the achievements of the forces of the sea, of the air, nor the multitudinous ancillary services which contributed to the well-being and movement of the Army. No one, in retrospect, who regards the Great War can fail to observe in the centre of the picture the Infantry soldier. Overwhelmingly the Infantry outnumbered other Services. Strategy and tactics were throughout subordinated to Infantry action. So, the Warrior must be a 'footslogger.' He is all the type of England and of Wales, of Scotland, Ireland, the Dominions, and our Colonies. He goes where every man went. He fights where and as every man fought. He plays as every man played. And he survives to tell his story. Warrior.

There has been a devastating flood of war literature. Indeed, every theatre and aspect possesses a considerable literature of its own. The student of history may indeed be puzzled, and might be tempted to turn in confusion to some other theme, were not war so inextricably inter-twined with the problems of social organization and with economic questions.

But war is at once and all the time a matter of Man himself. Statecraft, strategy, and tactics; the engines and weapons of war remain sterile and inoperative without the will and hands of men.

We may rejoice that contemporary statesmen and military leaders, as well as some competent critics, have given us the record of grand strategy. Supreme is Winston Churchill's *World Crisis*. He himself, hurrying from Conference to Conference, holding great office, in touch with everyone who mattered, provides a

¹ *The First Hundred Thousand*, by Ian Hay. *Fiery Particles*, by C. E. Montague. *The Spanish Farm Trilogy*, by R. H. Mottram. *Zero Hour*, by Georg Grabenhorst.

masterly story. Liddell Hart in his *Foch. The Man of Orleans*,¹ is the supreme critic, concise, keenly analytical, meticulously careful, scrupulously just.

The literature concerning man himself is either largely misleading or incomplete. There are notable exceptions, such as Edmund Blunden's *Underlines of War*, itself, however, covering only some sectors of the front and of necessity omitting many vital months. I know of no publication of which it can be said by future generations—"This was man of the early twentieth century at war. This was his experience, this his behaviour."

It is a sad reflection that the standard of war literature, for publishers at least, was set by Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Others, most of whom saw little enough of war, doubtless with the hope of reaping the rich royalties of a best seller, followed hot foot in the German's wake in order to participate in his victory. The writer, who may but a few years earlier have pursued the German armies as part of Haig's great drive, was not to be cheated by Remarque of victory upon his own ground, nor the English publisher by the allies of Ullstein. So a new literature of war poured from the presses, multiplied by "the movies." It sought to establish for all time that in the Great War men were cowards, shivering with an ague of fear in their dugouts, instead of quietly playing bridge and shove-halfpenny; that drunkenness was the fashion rather than a rare occurrence, and that men died like brutes, with curses on their lips.

In recording dialogue I have deliberately refrained from introducing certain unpleasant words of most common currency, especially as adjectives, because we must recognize, though deplore, that they are as common in everyday life as they were in camp and billet and on the battlefield. There is no loss to truth in their omission, and the gain is to those who find such words offensive.

The generation of to-day has been taught to believe, if indeed it has not long since thrown this trash upon the ash-heap, that war was a continual sexual debauch, where in truth man went

¹ History and autobiography recommended also: *Official History of the Great War. Military Operations. France and Belgium.* Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: *His Life and Diaries*, by Major-General Sir C. E. Callwell. Sir Douglas Haig's *Despatches. Soldiers and Statesmen*, by Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson. *The Memoirs of Raymond Poincaré* (French). *Fix Bayonets!* by John W. Thomason (American). *Out of My Life*, by Marshal von Hindenburg (German). *General Headquarters, 1914-1916, and its Critical Decisions*, by General E. von Falkenhayn (German). *Schlachten des Weltkrieges*. Edited by the Reichsarchiv. Numbers 7, 10, 21, 22-26, 27, 28-29, 31, 32, 34.

weeks and months without sight of a woman, unless she be some ancient woe-begotten wench profiting immensely from washing shirts and charging famine prices for pickled eggs. The reader has been led to believe, unless indeed he knew the whole or half the truth before, that every attack was a costly failure, that assault followed assault until each man and every man died, his body hideously torn and mangled. In fact, man at war expended most of his time conducting the venture of trench defence, as dirty, dull, and prosaic an affair as life in many an English coal-pit and workshop. And he played football, "House" and "Crown and Anchor," or gossiped in ill-lighted taverns.

It has been reported that our leaders were both rogues and fools, while I have seen a general win a battle in the morning and help Belgian farmers stack their corn at the evening hour. *All Quiet on the Western Front*, with its reproductions in theme and in detail from many pens and many publishing houses, is so foul a slander, so false, that nothing will suffice but that it be torn from the body of literature. Its place is the sewage over which its author and his satellites so unashamedly gloat. Remarque's puppets had no counterpart in the British armies, and with emphasis I declare also that they do in no manner, also, typify the German soldier.

War is a dirty business, and no amount of literary gloss can make it otherwise. Nor does a uniform change the heart and character of British citizenship. In the public servant we see the mirror of ourselves. As we are, as we feel and think, as we behave, so does and did the British soldier. Human nature at all its points is frail, but rather is it strengthened by courageous and sympathetic leadership, by the paternal influence of a generous-hearted commander, by the selfless example of stronger men in the close companionship of a warrior's life. And though we may always find the fearful and the harsh among leaders as among the led, it is true, also, that leadership of men never more fulfilled its high sanction. "Greater love hath no man than this . . ." The toll in life among leaders was very high in proportion to those led.

If, then, these much yaunted and advertised books present a faithful picture of man at war, then must we regard ourselves as degraded and debauched beyond recognition.

And by ourselves I mean man by his fireside, in the bosom of family life—man in his club—man in the workshop, at the bench and the loom—man tilling the fields and gathering the harvest—man in the pit and occupied in transport—man at the desk and

in the consulting room—man, teacher and student, in the university and the classroom—man in all the affairs of British civilization.

Though war, especially that on the Western Front, was sometimes so horrible as to beggar description, and in a manner which those who did not experience it can never fully understand, one thing is certain, namely that the Great War raised the qualities of honour, patriotism, and devotion to an ideal, to an eminence never previously attained in all the history of mankind. I veritably believe, nay I am sure, that if the nation again is called upon to respond to a defence of our heritage, of the ideals which we have sown, bearing, too, a rich harvest in every corner of the earth, our people will rally as they did when, for us who survived the storm of steel, all the world was young.

Nisi dominus frustra.

In the early scene in *Macbeth*, "a bleeding soldier," for the information of King Duncan, recites the detail of the victory obtained by Macbeth over the rebels, Macdonald and Cawdor. Success in battle in those days depended perhaps more upon strong arms than on wise heads. The whole of this sanguinary engagement was seen by "the bleeding soldier," and from first to last it was intelligible to him.

In a scientific age only those who are possessed of all the desiderata confronting a general before a battle is joined are truly in a position to criticise its events.

I have not sought to camouflage criticism of certain aspects of behaviour in anticipation of arousing prejudice. Rather have I endeavoured in candid discussion to dispose of ugly rumours and of memories held by some.

When the "Iron Duke" was shown pictures of the Battle of Waterloo, he was accustomed to remark "Too much smoke." The most correct account of an engagement, as it appeared to him, by a soldier of the Great War would probably be "All smoke, with a liberal allowance of shell and machine-gun fire."

Unlike the troops engaged in the most important events of the Crimean War, the soldier did not, however, observe, as did the troops before Sebastopol, "We must wait for newspapers from home to learn what we have been doing." Printed matter, lucid and sufficiently explanatory, was always available to junior commanders that they might acquaint the troops with the objective sought and with the purpose of the general strategy employed.

Nevertheless, while fighting is in progress the Warrior remains in complete ignorance of success or failure, except in his own immediate vicinity, perhaps a matter of fifty yards to right and left, and of his own progress or retreat. The fact that he does not know when he is beaten may be due quite as much to the soldier's lack of information, as to his possession of superabundant courage and stubbornness. Often he does not know for certain when he is victorious. He is generally inclined, however, to think this the case, his hopes largely influencing the belief; but faith in the good fortune of his "own side" is not peculiar to the soldier.

At no time in battle can the Warrior be certain that the small pattern provided by his own success will correspond with the bulk of the battle. The picture is a very large one, and he is so close to the canvas that he is no competent judge of the whole effect. What he does see he may see very plainly, even down to the minutest details. But he is liable to many misapprehensions, and the private soldier's account of a battle is invariably incomplete.

Those who served only in the ranks sometimes express the view that the officers looked at life through spectacles of a different colour from their own. I will not enter the lists as one of the disputants. But I will utter one dogmatic statement. The officer who had learned his business, not always an easy task; and who, beyond this, had triumphed in the far more difficult matter of understanding something of human psychology, of men and motives, did in fact know a great deal more of the character and thoughts, conscious and subconscious, of the private soldier under battle conditions, than the average private soldier could possibly understand for himself. If that were not so the appointment of officers would be absurd, and leadership would be meaningless.

The story of battle, if told only in heroics, as I might tell it, for I confess unashamedly to having enjoyed the War, would be anything but a portrait of the Warrior. The wars of history from which can be extracted, for example, the heroism of "The Diehards" at Albuera, of the Light Brigade at Balaklava, and of Field-Marshal and Lieutenant Roberts, father and son who won the Victoria Cross, indeed, all tales of those who were awarded this envied Decoration, are inspiring reading, but they are not the history of war.

History rarely succeeds in making its narratives of battles wholly intelligible to the ordinary reader. The historian cannot

stoop to minutiae. He is constrained to regard details as ephemeral. Yet it must not be forgotten that there is always a public to whom small things are important. The private soldier himself belongs to that class to whom in general small things are of essential importance. For example, many are able to realize the effect of famine in a town far more vividly by learning that the price of eggs were so much a-piece, or that cats and dogs were saleable as articles of food. And the soldier's account in a great battle has value and interest. Few men can put themselves in the place of a battalion; but the reader can readily fancy himself in the situation of a single combatant. The homely narrative of individual adventure may bring the scene described more closely home to the mind of the general reader than pages of regular history.

The objective herein is to provide a record which may vitally stimulate the imaginative faculties. I have endeavoured to place facts beside theory, for it requires some knowledge of theory to understand the facts, and knowledge of facts to appreciate the theory. The task of reading all works of authority would be too formidable. Herein the vital factors affecting the temper, mood, and character of the soldier have been extricated. The bare bones of strategy and statecraft remain as the framework only to the portrait.

The method of presentation has been to borrow in some manner from the technique of cinematography. Pursuing a story, written often as sheer reporting, the reader will discover himself confronted with "close-ups" of scenes and customs, whose importance must be magnified. Seen from various critical angles they have been set out for contemplation. And sometimes the speed of the narrative is slowed down. I have considered that such "slow motion," accentuating certain incidents, does not distort their value. For they dissolve in the story as does "slow motion" in the editing of a series of camera shots. There may be some passages where "close-ups" or "slow motion" are detached and may appear as over-accentuation. Especially may this be so among those whose minds are sealed by conventional outlook, and who lack that breadth of experience and vision to be tolerant of criticism which appears to come close home. But, I suggest in this way the events on the Western Front from 1914 to 1918, as they influenced the psychology of man, achieve their true perspective.

This narrative is punctuated throughout by observations, historical; affecting the principles of war, strategy, and tactics;

organization and administration, the bodily and spiritual welfare of troops in the field, so that at the end, not only may history have fulfilled itself, but there has been marshalled, also, the evidence from a host of witnesses to assist the reader to understand "what the troops had been doing and why they did it."

I, who write this book have this justification that with scarcely a break from the earliest days of the conflict until the end I served within the same Division, the largest tactical unit in the field. Its Infantry composition was of battalions, Regular, Territorial, Special Reserve, and the New—Kitchener's—Army. They were drawn from the countryside and from the city, from the placid counties of rural pursuit, and from the busy industrial north of England, from Wales, from Scotland. For more than two years those under my immediate command, my daily associates, my friends, were men, English, Scots, Welsh, and Irish, town boys and country lads, old soldiers who remembered the Khyber Pass and youngsters whose latest memory was of the schoolroom. No Division was more representative of British soldiers. I claim, therefore, some special authority. I think I may be at once an expert witness, and the candid, yet sober, advocate. I believe, also, that I may prove to be the impartial and just judge, judgment tempered with sympathy, judgment which disentangles fact from fiction.

And I am persuaded to record these things fully in a volume apart from anything which is history, autobiography, or beneath the guise of fiction, which I have formerly written, because the critics have contributed the urge.

I am tempted to write of some imaginary person, a composite, my shadow and that of thousands of others with whom I came in contact during those four tragic, thrilling, happy years. But, then that would be but imagery. Truth would be sacrificed or camouflaged in the endeavour to shade over my own personality and to merge it in that of others. I was an average man, of average age, of average experience, possessed of the average of British characteristics, virtue and fault alike. I am Warrior. But what I saw, experienced and felt is that which was seen, experienced and felt by every man who sojourned during those years for months, or but an hour, "somewhere in France or Flanders."

Therefore, WARRIOR,

GRAHAM SETON HUTCHISON.

Acknowledgment

I DESIRE to acknowledge with gratitude the courtesy which I have received from the Curator of the Imperial War Museum, and his Staff. I desire, also, to express my thanks to Richard Aldington for his quick generosity in permitting me to quote from his poetical works, and to Laurence Binyon for permission to republish verses from "For the Fallen." To Edmund Blunden I again express my thanks for permitting me to quote from his works. To John Galsworthy I am indebted for permission to publish some verses of his poem "Youth's Own." I am indebted, also, to A. P. Herbert. For permission to republish poems by the late "Edward Melbourne" and Charles John Beech Masfield, both of whom gave their lives in action, I am indebted to Messrs. Erskine MacDonald Ltd., who first published an anthology of war poems.

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I am most grateful to my friends of the Worcestershire Regiment for permission to republish some pictures by Gilbert Holiday and Snaffles which appear in the Regiment's History in the Great War, and are the Regiment's property. The author of this superb Regimental Record is Major H. FitzM. Stacke,

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

M.C., to whom I extend my thanks. These pictures are marked "W" in the right-hand corner.

Some pictures have been selected from a variety of German war histories. I feel sure that the authors and publishers of these works will be glad of their publication herein. They are marked with a "G."

The sketches by the author, reproduced herein, are marked "A," and were made in the field.

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WARRIOR

CHAPTER I

THE CALL ANSWERED

AUGUST 1914

Mobilization, overseas, at home—Reservists—All manner of men came home—On the high seas—British soldiers contrasted with Continental armies—The warrior's characteristics.

By all the glories of the day,
And the cool evening's benison :
By the last sunset touch that lay
Upon the hills when day was done :
By beauty lavishly outpoured,
And blessings carelessly received,
By all the days that I have lived,
Make me a soldier, Lord.

By all of all men's hopes and fears
And all the wonders poets sing,
The laughter of unclouded years,
And every sad and lovely thing :
By the romantic ages stored
With high endeavour that was his,
By all his mad catastrophes,
Make me a man, O Lord.

I, that on my familiar hill
Saw with uncomprehending eyes
A hundred of Thy sunsets spill
Their fresh and sanguine sacrifice,
Ere the sun swings his noonday sword
Must say good-bye to all of this :
By all delights that I shall miss,
Help me to die, O Lord.¹

AS one trained to the profession of arms, I suppose it is true that I welcomed war. Like many others, who immediately after the Declaration on 4th August, 1914, flocked to the Standard to return to their parent regiments, or

¹ "Before Action," by "Edward Melbourne." (W. N. Hodgson, M.C., Lieutenant, Devon Regiment. Killed in the Somme Advance, July 1916.)

to join the ranks of some new-formed fighting unit, I was at an outpost of Empire.

Those few days of suspense which preceded Britain's entry into the War found me in Salisbury, the capital city of Southern Rhodesia. Rhodesia was not yet the youngest among the self-governing dependencies, and was still administered by the British South Africa Company. I had been seconded for military service with the auxiliary forces, as Intelligence Officer and as Personal Assistant to the Commandant-Général. And though German-East Africa, with a Government directed by the redoubtable von Lettow Vorbeck, bordered our northern frontier, while German possessions in South-West Africa thrust territory, pointed like a dagger, towards the British frontier at Livingstone on the Zambezi, none of us had ever experienced any sense of the strategic danger which threatened British-Rhodesian existence on two fronts. Even those concerned immediately in their day-to-day occupation with military organization, as was I, only dimly realized the possibility of conflict with Germany, nor had we even contemplated the consequences.

Rhodesia, typical of other parts of a world-wide Empire, whether Burma or Nyasaland, the Himalayan foothills, or Bermuda, was so remote from the reverberations in Europe that only the faintest echo reached even the headquarters of Government.

And when the War suddenly therefore burst upon us, announced in a Proclamation by the Administrator, the effect was as dramatic as it was sudden. Business came to a standstill. Patriotic fervour stirred the hearts of men long exiled from their Mother Country, and of youths who realized England only as an ancestral home. The towns of Salisbury and of Bulawayo were agog with citizens; while the mushroom grown "dorps" became the meeting-places of men who had ridden in from the surrounding farms and mines, eager with offers of help. As history has since recorded, the Rhodesia of my experience was typical of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, and of every territory which flew the British flag.

My experience in an outpost of Empire was but a reproduction of what occurred throughout the English countryside. Days of sultry summer had passed, with newspapers filled with rumours of war. Countrymen rode down the narrow lanes, heavy with the scent of honeysuckle and meadowsweet, the hedges hung with hay swept from the sides of bulging wagons. They gathered in the market towns to glean any fresh tidings which

might have filtered through. The markets were alive with gossip.

The villages and countryside were swept of their inhabitants. Farmers with South African memories speculating on the price of horseflesh, of corn and oats ; sailors and reservists in a mood of aimless expectation as the war clouds gathered. Country gentlemen holding Militia and Territorial commissions ; farm labourers, grooms, ostlers, small tradesmen, house-boys. Buxom wives and slim girls, some shy, others giggling ; and the flotsam and jetsam which seem to spring from nowhere, wherever and whenever a crowd gathers, and without which no human assembly in civilization is complete. Beggars, tipsters, touts, preachers, ladies of no virtue, and men for whom the devil had discovered something to refurbish their hours of idleness ; brawlers, drunkards, surly and hilarious ; a tolerant policeman or two. An English crowd held in suspense, docile, with its innate sense of order, waiting in its various mood for something concrete to happen, or for someone to tell them what to do.

In this mood, if English character produced as many practical jesters as some of her Continental neighbours, a buffoon could commit his fellows to almost any imbecility, a knave could start a revolution, and a revivalist produce a crusade. But, fortunately, though England possesses its full share of the world's wits and humorists, some inherent, abiding sense of fitness, except in the privileged madcap circles of University students, licensed by the tolerance of public opinion, prevents them from practising either stupid or violent stunts upon the hard mentality of their fellow-citizens less capable of appreciating the humours of the Gadarene swine, or life as a perpetual pantomime, and human co-operation as an occasion for recurrent carnival.

Therefore, though a few serious-faced leg-pullers can achieve a livelihood by extracting hard-earned pence from the pockets of simple gullible folk, the majority will offer a high-powered resistance to workers of miracles, unprofessional healers, quacks, and, not least to the man who seeks to mock their emotions.

But England had been shaken in its lethargy, and rumour quivered in the heart of the countryside. Streets were filled with carts and gigs, motor-cars and saddle horses. In any English country town, awaiting the inevitable aftermath of Serajevo, while the sinister Berchtold, whispering in the ears of two Emperors, the first sympathetic and senile, the second puffed with his own importance, rushed continental Europe into a World War in history's grimmest practical joke, there was an

assembly of English country bumpkins who would have resisted an intriguer's mutterings with a homely jest, or, if irritated by inopportune persistency, would have cooled his blood by a leisurely dipping in the horse trough.

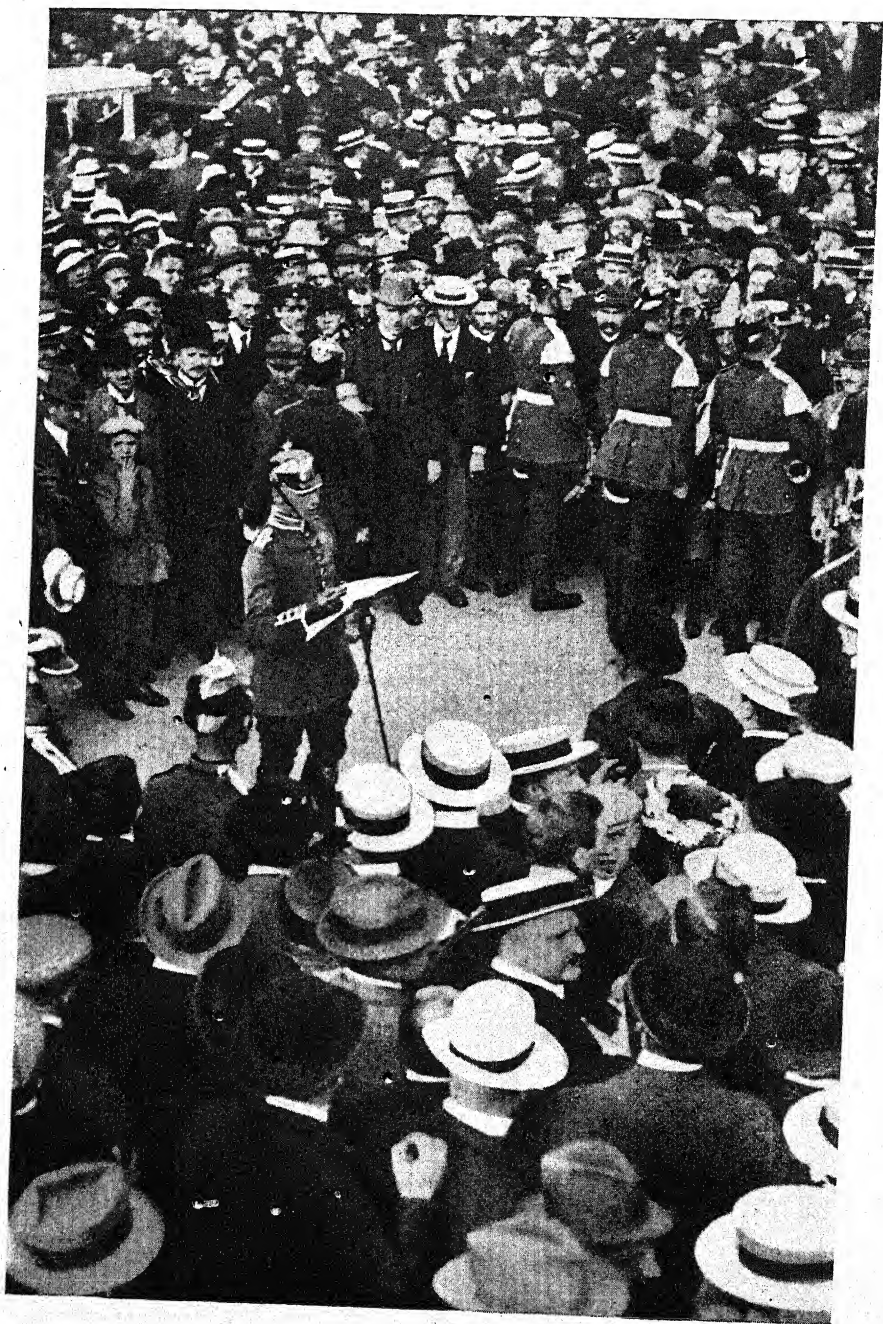
There had been weeks of splendid summer, and August had opened with golden days. On the 3rd of August Germany had declared war upon France: Belgium was drawn into the conflict, the Russian armies were advancing; Austria and the Balkan States were already committed to war. Britain's ultimatum had gone forth; her Navy, already under sealed orders, somewhere on the high seas.

The crowds in Britain's cities and market towns, as in every cluster of dwellings throughout her wide-flung Empire, on the 4th of August awaited the result upon which pent-up passions and forces burst into unparalleled conflagration and terror hitherto unknown, resembling some grotesque apocalypse than any real era of mortal transactions.

And so reservists, forsaking the workshop and the mine, and such avocations as had called them to civil occupation, hurried to their former Regimental Depôts. And the Special Reserve, that superb conception of Lord Haldane, providing at once discipline and occupation for young men engaged in seasonable labour, and an endless channel of reserves to the Regular Army in case of war, formed a phalanx of man supply behind the first Expeditionary Force. And while the Territorial Force mobilized, youths fresh from the training of their school Cadet Corps, took up the King's Commission, and adopted the profession of arms as their first venture in a world of men.

And in common with those who had the goings and comings along the highways of Empire, I came home. There were tea planters from Ceylon and Travancore, rubber growers from Malay, gold diggers from Klondyke and the Australian fields; tobacco planters and fruit farmers from Rhodesia; men whose cattle roamed the prairies of Canada and the South African veldt; hewers of timber from the forests of Borneo, and squatters from the Australian bush; merchants from the Indian bazaars, traders from Nigeria and the deserts and swamps of the Sudan.

From every corner of the earth, in British ships, men came home. There were lads whose life had been all holiday, and men to whom Fate had dealt no cards of luck: some whose duties had been professorial in native colleges and schools, and others possessed of no less academic attainment, who toiled beside black-skinned workers in the mines. Some who had lived hard, who



PROCLAMATION OF WAR BEING READ BY GERMAN OFFICER IN THE
UNTER DEN LINDEN, BERLIN, 5 P.M., 31ST JULY, 1914



GERMAN ADVANCE INTO BELGIUM, AUGUST 1914

drank hard, blasphemed, and yet as they thought of home, discovered their hearts as tender as those others who were missionaries and younger sons who had but just ventured from the quiet circle of family life.

They, we, all came back, almost to a man. And not alone from the traffickings of an Empire, but from the Americas and from Europe. From wherever the net of Imperial trade was spread, men came. Only some unhappy souls were trapped in Germany, and were there interned for four most bitter years. And even from the camps of the easily caught, men came, later—escaped. But that is another tale.

And while the Haldane plan of military mobilization fashioned itself upon all possible reserves, and the British Expeditionary Force planted its first foot in France and Flanders, the magic name of Kitchener rang as a clarion call for more men, millions of men. And we came home.

The manner of my return is worthy of record, for I witnessed the first defence of Britain commencing that swift task which within a few short weeks had swept the high seas clear of German ships. I saw the Navy and the Mercantile Marine, its stout reserve, at work, and it was worth the sight.

I left Cape Town on board the *Union Castle* liner, *Edinburgh Castle*, a name appropriate enough for me who had marched in the Army beneath a glengarry crowned with the silver emblem of that castellated rock which towers above the Scottish capital, a subaltern of the King's Own Scottish Borderers. And day by day I trod the decks, with others who had at shortest notice left farms and affairs to come home.

We scanned the seas, searching their endless blue horizons for faint streaks of smoke which would tell of some friendly vessel flying home, or an enemy searching for its prey. The excitement by day was very real, and by night also with screened lights, for it was known that the great corsair of the high seas, *Der Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse*, harried the traffic of the Pacific. British seamen might guess from the rumour and suggestion of a wireless message where next the giant Hamburg-Amerika liner, chivvying Allied shipping, would appear; when she might halt for coaling, where hide and lurk; when and where bear down upon and overhaul a less speedy vessel. And the officers of the Mercantile Marine might wonder, too, from whence would appear a German cruiser; or some other merchantman bristling with guns. Our seamen, whose ships were the ships of peaceful trade and unarmed, could only fly from port to port, with furnaces stoked

high and racing engines, rushing home, the holds and decks piled with men and material.

Day after day we could observe the sweating stokers as they came forth for an hour's respite from the furnaces, and see the men who kept double watch, faces wrinkled with gazing across the trackless waste of ocean, whose every wave crest might have concealed a periscope, every trough a mine.

While *Der Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* fought to the death and sank off Teneriffe, the *Edinburgh Castle*, eluding Fate on the other side of the island, rushed through the sea, turning aside from her accustomed course, and found the port of Gibraltar. Every available ship, possessed of both speed and capacity, was required to bring men home. Almost so soon as the liner had berthed beneath the Rock, hosts of naval ratings and carpenters swarmed on board to convert this pleasant passenger vessel into an improvised troopship. Even as they worked two battalions, the Gloucester Regiment and the Royal Scots Fusiliers, were marshalled on the quayside and marched on board, the officers to be accommodated in cabins hastily vacated by civilians, and the men to congregate upon the promenade decks. Within a few hours, with some details, also, of artillery, and medical and supply services, the *Edinburgh Castle*, under full steam, sailed forth into the Mediterranean and turned north for England.

Preceding the liner, and thrown out on her flanks, was an escort of torpedo-boat destroyers, their black hulls low in the water, throwing clouds of spray, their stacks belching smoke. As they provided protection for the vessel, so also with eager eyes they sought for prey. Each ship on the high seas was overhauled, and we could observe a boat lowered from one of the escort and hurry to examine the stranger. Twice, as we crossed the Bay of Biscay, the whale boats of the British Navy returned with an added complement of civilian sailors, for these were ships out of German and Austrian ports. A destroyer's guns blazed. The side of the enemy ship was rent with shell fire; she staggered, and then sank. The cruel necessity of war, with its economic pressure and wholesale destruction, so far divorced from the field of battle, impressed my mind as I watched these apparently futile sinkings. But we had yet to experience the fear of the U-boat campaign, which in 1917 so nearly threatened Britain with starvation.

As we turned up Channel and sought Southampton a cruiser greeted us; and hosts of small craft, flying the white ensign, hurried busily about the seas. We were all agog for news. Already wireless messages told us of the landing of the Expedi-

tionary Force in France. Of its fate we knew nothing, until the Captain summoned the officers into the saloon and read the first dread message giving tidings of Mons and Le Câteau. There was a terrible silence before he commenced reading. As we waited for a moment, watching the Captain's grave face, I saw all around me the eager heads of soldiers thrust through the windows of the saloon. Then the Captain read to us the bare story of how the British Army had been overwhelmed and thrust back towards Paris. He recited the names of famous regiments which had disappeared, with long lists of casualties, dead, wounded and prisoners of war, trampled beneath the foot of the invader. At Gibraltar I had donned my uniform, the single representative of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders ; and as the name of my Regiment was counted in the hideous list, tears flooded my eyes. But a senior captain of the Gloucesters, who stood beside me, pressed his fingers strongly into the muscles of my arm, as a comrade, and gave me manly comfort.

Then, almost as we berthed, I ran down the companion-way, my heart on fire, and jumped into the first train out of Southampton. At Waterloo Station I telephoned to my mother and then hurried to the War Office to ask for marching orders. A crowd stood in Whitehall watching the goings and comings from the portals of that great edifice which, with its twin, the Admiralty, across the street, for four years was to become the centre of an Empire's activity. Already wounded had arrived in convoys from France, and there was a sprinkling of men in khaki in the streets. But the public of London was unfamiliar with its Army, and as I pressed through the throng I found myself a centre of curiosity and speculation.

As I entered the War Office my highest hope was to be sent at once to the Front. If I had found now the opportunity to put my professional training to the test, and in contemplation experienced a thrill of satisfaction, it is true also that tens of thousands of other young men, who had never been concerned with the profession of arms, except possibly in the days of their youth as members of Cadet Corps, were filled with the same kind of zest for adventure, and a vaguely realized patriotic sense which, on analysis, I am now sure was the basis of my own heart-beats.

It would be a travesty of truth to suggest that the professional soldier of the small standing British Army was at any time pre-occupied with the idea of aggressive warfare, or had conceived, as the result of studies in strategy and tactics, any desire to domination by force of arms and by means of battle. The train-

ing of the British Army was essentially designed for the maintenance of Empire and for the defence of subject peoples. Rather was the British Army, so soon to incur the sneer of the "All-Highest," the German Kaiser, as "French's Contemptible Little Army,"¹ a police force, concentrated at its posts throughout the world, keeping open the ways of trade, having available to it a few Divisions of mobility to aid any one of those posts in case of racial trouble, rebellion, or turmoil.

In character, therefore, the professional soldiers of the British Army were somewhat different from their counterpart in the armies of the Continent. In these latter could be observed great numbers of citizen soldiers, inured in youth to the idea of military operations on the grand scale, under the direction of a caste of professional soldiers, concerned as a General Staff with the intrigues of statecraft and with the considerations of strategy. For the continental General Staffs the ebb and flow of conscript recruits from citizen manhood invited little of the parental attitude existing as between the officer and soldier in the standing British Army, that of leader and led. The fact of hosts of men, the led, was rather but a machine to be utilized in the furtherance of national ambitions. The Staff Corps of Germany, France, and any other of the continental countries, were therefore immediately interested in war as a means to serve their own ambitions. Possessed of few lands, in terms of Colonial Empire, it was well-nigh impossible for them to conceive of soldiering as a benevolent police force; and the territories, in which soldiers might be called upon to serve, as playgrounds upon which the soldiers themselves were referees and kept order in the ring. The professional soldier, for example, of the armies of Germany and of France, could only discover an ultimate interest in his profession in the ordeal of trial by battle. War for him was a dominant issue, one to be exalted and encouraged as the ultimate test of strength and of character between one nation and another.

There was, therefore, this essential difference in outlook between the man called to the profession of arms serving the British Empire, and him who was a member of the *corps d'élite*, the General Staff of the armies of the Continent.

This divergence in essential outlook, permeating the national armies from top to bottom, seems to account for action on the part of troops which to the military historian sometimes appears contrary to expectation, if not inconceivable.

On the outbreak of war, even after four years of its duration,

¹ There remains considerable doubt whether the Kaiser or any other German ever in fact employed this expression. As propaganda it served its purpose.

nothing seemed more remote from possibility than a wholesale mutiny in the disciplined armies of the German Reich. No one, also, expected a stubborn mutiny in the French Army, especially at a moment in 1917 of dire peril to the Allied Cause. And though the British Army was but loosely knit by any form of preconceived military discipline; though its tactical control and administration was largely in the hands of men who but a few months or years earlier, within an easy-going democracy, had known nothing of the soldier's sense of discipline, throughout the four years of war there was not a single instance of concerted insubordination. Rather, because the discipline instilled throughout the ranks of the British Army was traditionally of the paternal order, did our troops, individually and as a whole, willingly submit themselves to the control necessary to military operations. This paternal characteristic in government, traditional as it had been in the old Regular Army, communicated itself from the High Command to the least among camp followers. It remains a remarkable factor underlying the ardours and endurances, the patience and the heroism of the British armies in France and Flanders. It accounts for the idealisms which, when disputations, questionings, and lack of faith in generalship and objective undermined the armies of France, caused the selfless and heroic response to Haig's call to his troops at the hour of greatest peril in March 1918:

"There is no other course open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man: there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall, and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight to the end."

And it was this same unquenchable spirit, based on qualities of highest sanction, which inspired the thin line of British defence to defeat and finally to overwhelm Ludendorff's grand offensive, which throughout three weeks at every point hammered at the British gates.

It is clear that the propaganda of "Der Tag" and of "the will to win," with which the German armies had been impregnated by militarists, at whose head loom the names of Bismarck, von Bülow, and von Moltke, when it failed as an urge to victory and to the fulfilment of dimly realized national ambition, could not serve also to sustain the cohesion of the German National Army in the field. And though when the first German offensive had been brought to a halt in the battles of the Marne and of the Aisne, and victory had been denied by the intrusion of the "Contemptible Little Army," the propaganda

was reversed, and the German peoples were instructed that the fight was in defence of the Fatherland, the revolution which surely followed testifies that those who composed the German National Armies could not ultimately have faith in the idealistic objectives which had committed the nation to war.

And this is also true of those who put on the sky-blue uniforms of France. Within their ranks there appeared often doubts and questionings. The political ambitions and economic aggressiveness of French statesmanship, glaringly apparent in the disputations between the chiefs in the Senate and Commanders in the field, translated themselves throughout the ranks. Recovering from the first swift blows of the War, the gaping wound in the side of France stemmed by the British Army, the aggressive military spirit, which for generations had dominated French statesmanship, reappeared with all its vaunted ambitions. And, though in defence of Verdun no troops in all history have fought with greater gallantry than those of France, the fibre of the French National Army was weakened because, despite astute propaganda, the rank and file began to doubt the sincerity of those concerned with victory, when its possibility appeared within their grasp.

At no time in the history of the British Army in France did men doubt for an instant the purity of motive which had involved the Empire in war. Not for one instant did man question that even his life was demanded in defence of the cultural ideal. It was never conceived, nor was it ever apparent, that the British Empire would be the richer from victory, or the poorer from defeat.

The quest, one akin to the Knight Errant of mythology, happily remembered, was one of destroying the militarist system, of cutting finally from the body politic the theory of aggressive warfare as a means to serve national ambition. And, in consequence, unlike the armies of Germany and of France, those of Britain fought for abstract idealisms. The ranks were permeated with the same spirit which possesses lonely generals watching the trade routes from India into Central Asia, or governing the rugged rocks of Aden and Gibraltar; and of soldiers, men of British stock and character, teaching Sudanese boys to play football, and by their very presence sustaining a quiet peace among millions who swarm the Indian bazaars and the kraals of Africa.

It is true that from time to time there were minor outbreaks of indiscipline, in which perhaps a handful of men were concerned. But there was no mutiny of the size and character of

those which occurred in the armies of France and Germany. Nor were the causes of isolated outbreak in our Army as deep-seated as those others. They did not concern themselves with objectives, but with objectionable things and personalities which could be replaced. These were petty griefs and grievances, which a parental system of command could readily remove. The mutinies in the armies of France and Germany concerned themselves with the ultimate objectives of war. For us these were understood and appreciated, nor were they ever questioned.

It does not appear that these observations have been made elsewhere. In order to obtain a true perspective and understanding of the Warrior, it is necessary at once to understand the essential characteristic which devoted him to his task, as opposed to the varying influences which shaped and moulded the character of other warriors in the world conflict, whether friend or enemy.

Virtue, and military virtue too, were raised to a higher pedestal than ever before in the history of our race. This, from the fact that unswervingly throughout the four years of war, the motive which impelled British troops in the attack or in defence was in its very essence one of pure idealism. It was this factor which provided immeasurably to the strength of offence, filching from Germany "the will to win," and which contributed, also, such extraordinary composure in ill-circumstance, and the endless good humour which in trial and difficulty was our most effective source of reserve. It contributed a spirit unquenchable, embodying the fruitful seeds of victory. ~~It was the~~ burning flame of the dominant virtue among British racial characteristics. It was born of victory, and its end was victorious. No portrait of the Warrior would be complete without this halo, which makes luminous his every act. His faults and failings acquire colour therefrom. His qualities and triumphs shine with unquenchable light.

The Great War lasted for four years. Between August 1914 and the Armistice immense numbers of men, indeed the whole adult population between the ages of eighteen and forty were summoned to national military service. There remained only the exception of those employed in key industries, such as mining and munition making, although in the latter days these were severely combed. We may ignore those who found it convenient to have consciences preventing them from offering their bodies in defence of spiritual ideals, and others who entrenched themselves behind the bureaucracy of Government.

It is interesting, indeed, at the commencement of this narrative to examine the motives which impelled various classes of recruits to the military task. Early in 1914 the anguish of little Belgium was sufficient to call to the Colours the cream of British culture. It came voluntarily from all ages and classes of the community. And there was, too, the urgent need of France. Though, since the Treaty of Versailles, we may have acquired a deeper understanding of French policies, and think perhaps that France has been fickle towards that selfless friendship which tens of thousands, without thought of the morrow, offered to her peoples in their hour of need, we cannot question the motive. These first volunteers were impelled and inspired by the highest ideal in defence of the weak against the strong. They came to the assistance of the oppressed against the oppressor. The music-hall ditty sang it in our ears until the eyes grew dim. The hoardings awakened compassion. The Press, with all its power, tugged at the heart-strings.

The first warriors went as Crusaders. And so it was with young men until the bitter end.

In the early days there may have been added to this patriotic fervour the spice of adventure, but certainly it is true that as the casualty lists grew in length, and scarcely one family in the land did not lose a brother or a cousin, though war had been stripped of its glamour, volunteers still claimed their right to perform their duty. And there were elder men, long past military age, who lied like the proverbial trooper and so reduced their years that they found ~~themselves~~ as subalterns of companies, or merged in the ranks.

Military necessity demanded ever more men, and later in the campaign the pressed man and the combed man and the "Derby man," leaving heavy family responsibilities, joined the ranks. I do not think that these were ever inspired by the same ideals which are characteristic and traditional of the British race, though some deep-seated sense of duty made of them, when once committed, efficient warriors. And though the vast panoply of war, as armies multiplied in size, and operations increased their front and magnitude, seemed to extinguish the individual in the immensity of the plan, there can be no doubt that the same qualities of British patriotism carried and led the warriors to victory.

In all our history, except once, when England pitted her armies against men of English stock in America, the British race has never suffered defeat. Those who as invaders have come to

our shores have been absorbed. From the Romans we have taken law : from the Greeks acquired the arts : from the Norsemen we have been inspired with that restless spirit of adventure which has sent British ships and colonizers to make an Empire in the ends of the earth. We absorbed our Norman, Dutch, and Hanoverian kings, so that the First Citizen in the Empire, and the man who best portrays the British virtues is the King-Emperor, while his son, as a warrior, fought in France and Flanders. Even our religion is taken from the Jews, and crowned with the supreme spirit of self-sacrifice.

And so I, who had been brought up in the main channel of English tradition, came to the War, impelled by high patriotism, inspired by the culture which, through the medium of the soldier, traditionally had permitted the races and tribes of the world to go their ways in peace.

After a brief meeting with my mother I joined the reserves of my regiment, translated from Stirling's fine castle in Scotland to the Plumstead Marshes at Woolwich, in South-east London.

CHAPTER II

BAPTISM OF FIRE

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1914

Mobilization—Reservists—First volunteers—To France—Le Havre—
Pavé roads—Armentières—"The Thin Red Line"—"Strafe"—
Sniping—Ingenuity of the soldier—Trench pestilences—Influence
of cartoonists.

PROUD, proud we fling to the winds of Time our token,
And in our need there wells in us the power,
Given England's swords to keep her honour clean.
Which they shall be which pierce, and which be broken,
We know not, but we know that every hour
We must shine brighter, take an edge more keen.¹

A QUARTERMASTER, rubicund of face, rotund of body, well used to the encampments of soldiers, with the Indian plains and the South African veldt, Aldershot and Salisbury Plain as the background of his experience, might well be nonplussed with the task of receiving, housing, clothing, arming and dispatching trainloads of men, who daily poured in upon an encampment which was yet to be a camp. Plumstead Marshes, by Woolwich, would be a dismal place of habitation at almost any season. But this dreary sward, sunk to a level lower than that of the Thames, which beyond the shorn-up marsh flows greily to the sea, was a poor invitation to patriotism.

I arrived early in September, and already autumn rains and hundreds of feet had churned the turf to an oozing quagmire, from which projected the pyramidal lines of muddied tents. Some had boards to their floors, in keeping with custom and regulation. But in most the soggiess which encircled them, and of which the training grounds were made, was also the only couch of rest. But it possessed this comfort that, with twenty or twenty-four to a tent, made with a maximum capacity for fourteen, the bed was soft, and humanity could warm the wet mud mattress. Most of the reservists being prepared for the front were old soldiers, with a sprinkling of militia lads. Many, after relinquishing their Colour service, had lived hard, and some-

¹ From "Two Julys," by Charles John Beech Masefield, M.C., Acting Captain 5th North Staffs. Regiment. (Killed in Action, July 1917.)

times precariously. The astonishing discomfort of the camp, with its petty duties and endless marshalling in drizzling rain to receive equipment and to be checked for this and that, made them seek the warm bars of Woolwich and any place to escape the discomfort of this new soldiering, so unlike the amenities of Edinburgh barracks and Indian cantonments.

This was the heroes' hour. The days in which well-meaning young ladies handed white feathers, as often as not to men returned from the front and enjoying a few days of cleanliness in discarded civilian clothing, were yet to be. Every man was possessed of the Kipling halo of South African days—"Cook's son, duke's son, son of a millionaire. . . ." And these kilted warriors who hung about the Woolwich bars, so soon to go overseas to fire away the ammunition made by the highly paid workers of the Arsenal, were toasted beyond the limit of any alcoholic endurance.

In command of these thousands of ill-housed men, including myself, were four officers, with experience of manoeuvre and military administration. Added to us were three or four country gentlemen who, with fond memories and yearnings for abandoned grouse moors, found these marshes, with their human water birds, something indescribably depressing. But with that paternal and patriotic instinct which characterizes the country gentleman, they also accepted this new task. Slowly the hand of discipline closed upon the unruly element. But this was accomplished in such a manner that it should be least felt. Pressure was only exerted when accommodation became habitable, and especially when the call came for a new draft. Before many days were out there arrived a host of pink-cheeked boys, commissioned from the Scottish universities. As it happened a number of these were dental students. There still existed in most Regular Regiments a close-guarded hierarchy, resentful of outside intrusion. It was a resentment which had shown itself in the relations between the regular officer and the militiaman who was his first reserve. Many officers of the old Army had yet to have the horizon of their minds lifted to the nobility of a citizen endeavour.

Telegrams were received from the War Office for the preparation of more and more drafts. Almost as soon as men were received, equipped and armed, with a few hours' drill under a second lieutenant who, without previous experience, was urgently trying to discover his own self-confidence, they, hard-bitten men, led by an erstwhile schoolboy, went overseas to fill the gap in France.

The commander of my Dépôt would not release me. And so,

having been trained and certificated in the School of Musketry at Hythe, I found myself in charge of a new camp at Gravesend, with a new control of men.

The reserve to the old Regular Army had ceased to flow. And now there came the first volunteers who had never experienced a day's military training in their lives. They were given a few weeks in which to acquire all the knowledge that it had been considered necessary for the soldier to learn in seven years of service. With a staff of four sergeants of the reserve, two regular corporals from the Depôt and a bugler, I taught hundreds of men to shoot with the rifle, and dozens of young officers to instruct men how to shoot. We expended long and exasperating days, sometimes with men who would never learn to hit a haystack at twenty-five yards range, while within the Gravesend barracks, within whose boundary my camp lay, thousands of men poured in as recruits to the Middlesex Regiment. In comparison with these, at least those under my command were uniformed and armed.

But these latter were the volunteers, eager, high-spirited, anxious to learn, good-humoured, even under the tutelage of the most ferocious N.C.O. They would be called to some semblance of attention as we marched to, or returned from, the shooting ranges. Rather than return a military salute to a suddenly grave man who held a quivering hand at the brim of a straw hat, I wanted to wave to him. A shout of welcome seemed more appropriate to this body of men standing at attention clad in cricket trousers and pyjama jackets, the red tunic of a bygone age, bowler hats and riding breeches, blue dungarees and butchers' smocks, black coats with striped trousers, and white sun hats. And as they were in Gravesend, so, when I hurried home for a few hours' leave, I saw them in the fields and in the squares, learning the first rudiments of battle before being sent overseas to stem the tide of the German advance, and to dig a trench line across France beyond repulse.

We cannot reflect upon this great voluntary effort, wherein all the best elements of the nation were concentrated, without a glow of pride. No matter though old ladies sewed sandbags because they had heard that sandbags stopped bullets, and the production of body-belts increased ten-thousandfold. No matter that there was no sand in Flanders, and that body-belts were nurseries for lice. That others constructed elbow pads, lest the officer's tunic become soiled through being placed on the parapet while exploding the lethal weapon in his hands, and socks of

every shape were knitted by those who had never knit before, and knew nothing of the architecture of the foot, no matter. It was not the purpose to which hemp or wool might be put which mattered, it was the spirit which impelled old hands and young hands to busy themselves as the practical and individual expression of national idealism. And to the service of man we may, in these latter days, contemplate with pride that out of these unorganized knittings and makings have grown into national life craft centres and Women's Institutes from one end of the country to the other. But one making, at least, was never ill-directed, and that was the making of cakes and jam and honey, though as the pressure upon possible provision grew more acute, with what self-sacrifice the cake was made and sent to France.

Release came for me in early October, when having fulfilled sufficient of my task, and when, also, the 2nd Battalion in France was denuded of officers experienced even of humble command, I received my marching orders. In charge of a draft of two hundred men, accompanied by a fledgeling from Sandhurst, and a kid with the voice and manners of a child, as my juniors, we entrained at Woolwich Station by night. The draft was sober to a man, some testimony to the quiet discipline which had impressed itself upon the camp at Woolwich. Blinds were drawn, and it was not until we saw the lamps of Southampton that we knew that this would be the port of embarkation. We went on board at once; and as the steamer left Southampton Water all lights were extinguished, and ahead of us, through the gloom, leaving a phosphorescent wake, I could descry the bobbing stern and smoke-stack of an English destroyer.

I came from below decks to greet a cold grey morning, and found the vessel at anchor within a harbour. I was familiar since boyhood with the northern seaboard of France, and at once recognized Le Havre, towering above the city the white obelisk of Saint Adresse. So soon as it was fully light we berthed. The drafts, drowsy with sleep, cold and hungry, laden with equipment, waddled rather like ducks over the unaccustomed cobble stones, and formed up.

A guide, a private soldier, already cocksure in new surroundings, faintly patronizing, led my column through the eastern outskirts of the town, throwing a gibe as a sample of his prowess in the new tongue to the inquisitive, who even at so early an hour lined the streets. I suffered him kindly, for my little command, my first on active service, of which already I was inordinately proud, was in no mood to compete. The men slithered

and stumbled over the pavé roads, and I remembered that British troops had always sworn in France. We welcomed even the rutted track which led from the city to the wind-swept bluff overhanging the sea, upon which the concentration camp was perched.

Woolwich had provided our baptism of mud. The new sea of murkiness upon which rode a fleet of flapping bell tents, our destination, produced no fresh emotion. There were thousands of men peering from the foggy warmth of tents as we arrived, and some who picked a way, walking delicately, as did Agag, in search of food.

Hot tea, welcome beverage at the best and in the worst of times, was served in steaming dixies, those great black urns of military usage. It was late October, bitterly cold even for that season. Biting winds and sleet swept the camp. And we seldom crept out of our tents except to inspect rifles or dive into the town to buy eggs and sausages, which we cooked upon a newly purchased Primus stove. All Warriors can cook eggs and sausages.

Even two months after the declaration of war the inhabitants of Le Havre seemed strangely irreconcilable to and remote from its meaning. Small boys followed me through the streets exclaiming "Ecosais," and having discussed the phenomenon ran round to peep up into my face, as if to inquire whether the colour was the same as that of my protruding knees. The kilt of course gives an added illusion of height. My six feet of athletic masculinity, more rugged and picturesque in its Highland dress among the dapper Frenchmen of this commercial city, excited much comment in the shops. A lady assured me of the feeling of greater security which I had aroused; and apparently possessed of some historical learning reminded me of *l'alliance ancienne—La France et l'Ecosse*. She made it good that day, for I received a present of six eggs, though ancient.

Later even this alliance grew a little irksome, and while famine prices raged for eggs over the counter, Jocks "won" chickens in the backyard.

On the two days we tarried at Le Havre I made myself familiar with the "Standing Orders for the Expeditionary Force," by Field-Marshal Sir J. D. P. French, Southampton, 9th August, 1914, a pocket document of twelve pages bound in red. Its contents related almost exclusively to billeting and to the censorship of letters. I recall some paragraphs of which later events especially remind me. "The inhabitants are

never to be removed from the bed and room in which they are accustomed to sleep."

No one can complain that the Staff was lacking in a sense of humour.

The instructions concerning aircraft and the rules for safety to be observed by troops demonstrate how vast were the strides made in aviation during the War years. The sight of balloons in 1914 was more familiar to the mass of the public than was that of heavier-than-air machines, though the former was rare. Lord French therefore ordered that "Should it appear inevitable that an aeroplane flying low must strike any individuals, they should lie down in order to avoid being struck by the propeller." Yet only a very few cumbrous "buses," piloted by the Royal Flying Corps, took the air with the Expeditionary Force. And this, thanks to Winston Churchill, who after conferring with Rolls at Southampton had persuaded a few civil engineers to throw their life prospects into the melting-pot of the fighting arm. Added to these were a number of officers who while on leave had acquired flying certificates, and were seconded from their regiments and corps. These, like Trenchard and the Salmons, founded the great war-made tradition of the Royal Air Force.

On the third day of our sojourn in France I received orders to entrain for St. Omer, still for me but a name upon the map. I paraded my draft in a sleet storm driven before salt-laden wind gusts.

The Camp Commandant to whom I had listened as he addressed other drafts bound for the Front, exuded patriotic warmth in fervid speech, while icy water cascaded down our backs. But there was a new light in the eyes of my command, and it was with jaunty tread that we marched to the rail-head.

"The Thin Red Line" had held. How thin, so red the streak, and by what means it had held, only the "Angels of Mons" had known. Never before had my spirit so exulted—"The Thin Red Line" of history, and of my dreams, was somewhere at the halt in the railway track. And there I should be merged in its unbroken strength.

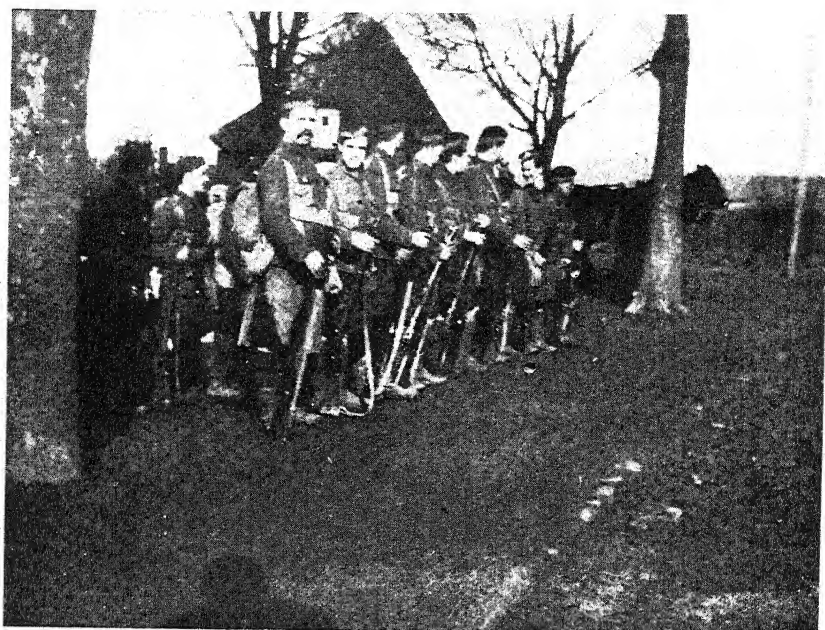
There may never have been any "Angels of Mons." But, lest men lose faith, let it be known that when "The Thin Red Line," Britain's last defence, in the hour of need has no other reserve with which to reinforce it, then do men discover angels. They stand beside the Warrior with flaming sword, and whisper comfort in the ear of the wounded. Their power is undefeatable, their strength unquenchable. The spirits of the battlefield in Britain's crisis will be all the generations of men of British blood,

the hosts who in some Valhalla of their own, out of cosmos, come again to make sure the unbroken destiny of their race.

All day we travelled through the placid low-lying fields of France, gazing upon quiet homesteads, deep woods in their winter sleep ; and we would wave frantically to the French patrols who kept watch over the track. They wore the peaked képis, red trousers, and dark blue coats of a bygone military France, ancient reservists, while the youth of France was locked in a fight to the death before Paris.

As night fell, St. Omer, headquarters of Sir John French, greeted us, and we detrained. It was dark when we arrived, and the road was deep in mud, and now was crowded with troops, wagons, and horses. A guide led us, with many halts, to the old town of Bailleul. When it is realized that within the sound of guns, but a few miles ahead, we were now only twenty-seven miles from Calais, it can be understood how fiercely the enemy had fought to seize the Channel ports, so nearly within their grasp. Very weary we turned into billets. The draft was accommodated under glass, a kind of low-lying Crystal Palace. There seemed to be acres of glass, in which were vines ; and these houses were well warmed against the coldness of the autumn night. Even so this was an unfriendly lodging, and the only food available were tins of bully-beef. We were given little time, however, for anything but the sleep of exhaustion, for at eight-thirty in the morning I was ordered to parade the draft and proceed to Croix du Bac. Along the road everywhere was movement, infantry reinforcements, and an endless stream of wagons and motor lorries. The thick black mud which filled the crevices between the cobble stones, giving to the road the appearance of a mosaic of black and white motif, was frozen. We marched as best we might, a discomforting experience, especially as the column in fours was obliged to hug tightly to the right of the road. Here its camber made it difficult sometimes for man to maintain his equilibrium. We were herded along, rather than marching in column of route. Every now and then the column would bulge like a rattlesnake swallowing its dinner, as a lorry, skidding and bumping, hurried past, spluttering the infantry from head to foot with black adhesive mud. We rested to eat a meagre lunch in the courtyard of a farm. And then rifle fire was heard much nearer, and occasionally I saw a curl of black smoke, and heard a dull detonation, which heralded the war of my dreams.

Late in the afternoon we marched into Armentières. The town was yet to suffer the shock of battle. The great square,



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A *

ABOVE: 1914 MACHINE-GUN SECTION, 93RD HIGHLANDERS, PARADED FOR THE LINE
 BELOW: BRITISH TRENCH LINE IN FRONT OF ARMENTIÈRES, NAMED "WILLOW TRENCH"



GERMAN SOLDIER

Sketched by the Author near Fricourt, Somme, 1916.

before which stood the Hôtel de Ville, was empty except for a few civilians who hurried anxiously about their affairs. But there were dim lights in the lower stories of the houses, for all the provision shops remained open and were doing a brisk trade. Others were heavily barricaded with timber ; and long before nightfall Armentières had the appearance of a city of the dead, through whose streets walked occasionally the muffled figure of a soldier. At the outskirts of the town the draft was met by a piper, who played us into billets at Houplines, a suburb at the end of the tramline connecting the dreary village with the town. He played "The Campbells are coming" which brought the inhabitants to their doors.

My command was very weary after fourteen miles of aggravating marching, carrying full equipment, but the men picked up the step. The Houplines of the invasion reminded me much of any town in Lanarkshire, with lean-faced Scots gossiping at the corners, and old women, snatching the last gleam of daylight, knitting before their doors unmoved.

To the east, but a mile and a half from the roadway which straggled through the town, could be heard the sharp crack of rifle fire, and the singing of a spent bullet as it tumbled through the air. Sometimes, too, but rarely, there was a dull crash as a shell from beyond tore its way through masonry. Though these first sounds made me jump a little, I noted that the inhabitants, fatalistic through four years, never moved an eyelid. Within twenty-four hours I was to witness the stoicism of a Flemish farmer who continued, immediately behind our front and only line at Bois Grenier, to plough his lands, walking behind a great white Percheron, oblivious to battle. And even when the German shells smote Houplines, its citizens clung to their shattered habitations, until, as I saw, some were slaughtered at the dinner table, and others, loudly protesting, were transported in British wagons to a safer zone.

It was freezing hard when we reached the headquarters of the Battalion in Houplines, and we were bivouacked in the gymnasium attached to the school. The greater part of the roof had been torn off, and the windows shattered. The floor was covered with glass and plaster. But around the sides was straw, and weary humanity, sustaining each other's warmth by close contact stretched itself out in rest.

The Battalion, until the arrival of the draft under my command, was but four hundred strong. On the following morning the men were paraded and allotted to the four companies. That to

which I was posted was commanded by an enthusiastic militiaman with South African service. It was in reserve, and I was provided with a more elegant billet than that suggested by the glass and plaster upon the floor of the gymnasium. The room upstairs contained a bed with clean sheets. The windows, like all others in the town, had been shattered. The night frost made of linen too cold an embrace, so I cast away the sheets and slipped in between the warmth of woollen blankets.

Next night I journeyed with my Company up the dog-leg road leading to the trench line. We turned aside at the bend in the road, where both report and experience told of a vigilant sniper, and stumbled across a turnip field, coming at length abruptly to a halt before a deep ditch ploutring in mud.

This was the trench, the only trench, held by "The Thin Red Line." The days of dugouts were yet to be. I was taken along the two hundred odd yards of Company front, the whole length of which consisted only of a rude ditch, some five feet deep, on the forward side of which, raised one foot, was a fire step enabling men to handle their rifles with greater comfort over the parapet. Except for those who stood as sentinels at intervals of ten yards distance, gazing into the impenetrable darkness of "No Man's Land," the men were disposed in what were known as "bivvys." These savage scratchings were but recesses cut in the rear face of the trench, of sufficient depth to permit man to be curled up, with a roof made of laths or doors, taken from the farmhouses in the rear. Bivvys were not bullet-proof, nor were they weatherproof, their floors slippery and damp, their walls always oozing water.

This trench was a friendly place : it had to be. Those who occupied it resembled a family party, sometimes a little quarrelsome at breakfast-time, but co-operating loyally in the domestic routine of the habitation. The daily work consisted in keeping arms, equipment, and ammunition clean, and in throwing out a series of T-shaped saps towards the enemy line, as listening posts to give warning against a surprise attack. Compared with the elaborate skill with which the trench systems were later constructed with the aid of engineered material and concrete, these fortifications were most primitive. The labour of moving Flanders mud, treacly and glutinous, required almost superhuman strength, and no little ingenuity. No sooner had a lump been excavated and laid on the parapet than it began to subside beneath its own weight, then to disintegrate and to slide down again into the trench. Work made little progress, but it kept us warm and filled the boredom of the day.

There was an extraordinary eeriness about the landscape. One's line of vision scanned the tufted tops of turnips, broken sometimes by willow trees ; and beyond the turnips was raised the pale brown edge of the German trench, behind which the ground heaved to form a ridge on which lay the village of Radinghem. By night wisps of mist billowed themselves across the ground between the lines, and formed cover for the working parties on erecting wire on both sides. But the nights, except for the rare crash of shrapnel, and the occasional crack or splutter of rifle fire, were peculiarly still. Except for mounting the parapets and improving the forward defences, which could not be done by day, we sat like night watchmen around coke braziers warming our hands, and smoking endless cigarettes. And as we sat in the stillness we could hear with great distinctness the sound of transport on the Radinghem road bringing up the German rations, in the same way as they must have heard the wheels of our wagons rumbling through the streets of Houplines and down the dog-leg road. But there seems to have been some unwritten law of "live and let live," for the ration parties of neither side were never "strafed."

The word "strafe" was of such common occurrence throughout the campaign, indeed it remains permanently embodied in the English language, that its origin may be recalled.

In September 1914, the Munich paper *Jugend* published a poem, "The Hymn of Hate," written by Ernst Lissauer. The final refrain of its three verses ran :

We will never forego our hate,
We have all but a single hate,
We love as one, we hate as one,
We have one foe, and one alone—

ENGLAND !

Throughout Germany "The Hymn of Hate" became the song of the hour.

In England it provided the theme for facetious mirth. Ridicule was heaped upon it. *Punch* published a cartoon, among its most historic contributions, of a "Study of a Prussian Family having its Morning Hate."

The German word "strafe" means to punish.

By soldiers it was used in numberless connections. To kill a louse was "to strafe it." To be "ticked off" by a superior officer, or at the orderly room, was "to be strafed." The over-talkative or "windy" man was told by his fellows to "strafe it !" implying "shut your face !" "hold your row !" and

similar admonitions for silence. An attack or a bombardment was invariably named "a strafe." So catholic was the word in its application that it threatened to displace the vulgar "bloody," and "strafed" certainly for a while displaced "dammed," though among the rank and file another unpleasant and indecent word, as an adjective, for some inexplicable reason, held the field with its endless repetition.

"Strafe it!" And so to an infinity of meaning.

The night was always more peaceful than the day. As artillery power increased this was later not apparent. In the shallow trench of our occupation daylight found us with bowed heads and bent backs waddling like ducks for fear of exposing a bobbing target to German riflemen. As we were to discover, the snipers were both good marksmen and well posted. From the vantage points of roofs and windows they peppered any movement in our lines. On my first day in the trench I witnessed my first casualty, an elderly man who, coming from his bivvy, for an instant raised himself to stretch in the morning air. The warning cry was too late. His cap tumbled off and he sagged at the knee, as little bits of bone and blood spots spattered his comrades and the trench side. Then he collapsed in a heap, a neat hole drilled in the forehead and a gaping wound at the back of the skull. Almost every day one or two men, for a moment unwary, were hit in like fashion. Two or three times, also, we were hard put to it to rescue men upon whom had collapsed, while they slept, the walls of the recessed bivouacs. But they were only shaken, a little bruised and frightened. I had yet to learn the ghastly consequence to sleeping men, dug into the sides of sunken roads, or down in deep dugouts, who were crushed and stifled when tons of earth collapsed upon them resulting from bombardment.

The Germans to our front were some three hundred yards away. A patriotic gunsmith in Edinburgh with his compliments had sent two telescopic sights to the Battalion. Coming from Rhodesia, and as an instructor in musketry, I was entrusted with the duty of this new form of big game shooting. Accompanied by a youngster, used to the moors, I fashioned an admirable sniper's post in the eaves of a farmhouse which stood back about a hundred and fifty yards behind the line. From this vantage point, with the aid of glasses, I could examine the German line at my leisure. Even after the relief by the Middlesex Regiment, I continued my vigil in the farm top, so that uninterrupted from day to day I might build from observation a working time table of enemy movement, and then arrange

the kill. I learned that at various points in the line, at different times in the day, men used to appear, or congregate. So when my plan was complete, while the uniformed gillie at my side sat with his field-glasses, quivering with excitement, I fixed my rifle and looked along its sights, my finger upon the trigger. During that first memorable day I bagged seven heads ; and from what I had observed I believe one to have been that of a senior officer. But as we on our side besought our artillery to expend a shell or two, no more being available, in the destruction of highly suspicious windows and roofs, so one day, when I was setting out for my butt, I saw this happy hunting lair go up in a cloud of pink and black smoke.

By night, from a flank, the enemy used to throw a strong searchlight across our trenches, brilliantly lighting them. This light appeared with the utmost suddenness. It was most disconcerting to working parties, who were obliged to throw themselves on their bellies in mud and wire to avoid the streams of machine-gun bullets which hissed across the parapet, or tinged in the wire entanglement, embedding themselves with a dull thud in the sandbags, so ill-named, which crowned the top of the trench.

A somewhat purposeless diversion, one which had its origin in some earlier tactical theory, was the patrolling of "No Man's Land," but it was practised also by the enemy. Therein lay its excitement. We would move in groups of two or three up and down the willow-lined ditches, or creep through turnip tops close to the German line. Sometimes we would walk into an enemy patrol. The nights were so dark that only a few yards divided us from them. Then surprised, both patrols would fly for safety to their own lines, or engage in wild shooting, which was taken up by both sides while the patrols clove to the ditches in "No Man's Land."

The ingenuity of the British soldier is proverbial. So quickly did he adapt himself to this new life, half human, half water-bird, that before three weeks were out the bivvys had been transformed to homes from home, with bedstead frames and mattresses, carried from the farmhouses, and lace-curtained windows looking out across the fields towards Houplines. And in "No Man's Land" we devised "booby traps." The war could not have been continued for a week without canned foods ; and these tins served a dual purpose. They were strung together on trip wires in the most inviting places for enemy patrols, with machine-guns trained upon them. So soon as the tins rattled fire was opened and a patrol hurried down the ditch to bring in the quarry, a

prisoner or a corpse. In the first experiment I brought in samples of each. But if the British soldier played with booby traps, the German was not to be denied, for they placed an explosive dummy in a ditch leading from our lines and much used by our patrols. The decoy proved, as was expected, too much for Jock's curiosity, and we lost two good men as the consequence. Despite its discomfort this second phase of war appeared to me rather as a dangerous game than as a deadly conflict between the two greatest world powers. And so it must have appeared to the Germans, for as we played practical jokes, so did they. When a mud effigy of the Kaiser was placed on our parapet, the Germans replied with John Bull, a very presentable character crowned with a top hat. Through loopholes we opened fire; and they, familiar with the British system of target practice, correctly signalled the "bull's-eyes" and "misses."

I suppose it must be true that the fires of patriotism were soon damped by the unequal struggle with the elements. All my energy and ingenuity were so fully engaged this November in providing for the comfort of those under my command that I had little time to think of the progress of the War. Men fell sick, that strange phenomenon known as "trench fever" assailing them, while those whose frames were inclined to any one of the rheumatic group of diseases, were bent and cramped with pain. The welcome rum jars, "S.R.D.," appeared with their tiny tots of burning liquid so warming to the inner man. But they brought with them, too, their temptations. Lest man yield a sentry was posted over these inviting comforts. My elderly Quartermaster-Sergeant, whose varied offices included sovereignty over the rum jar, with the thoughtful manner of a kindly landlady would always bring an extra tot to the officers' bivvy before those who had been on watch or patrol took to the blankets.

It was a desperate business this keeping the body free from ailment, more so than sustaining the spirits of men in so evil a plight. Fighting "Gerry," by which name the enemy was known to the rank and file, was a child's game in comparison with the war of the elements. The heavily manured fields and a close settled population possessed of only elementary sanitation did not contribute to the good health of those who lived their lives below the level of the soil. An abrasion quickly became a festering sore: even slight wounds were fraught with the danger of speedy gangrene.

Lice, marching in armies from heaven knew where, became the worst of plagues. They were no respecters of persons. We

wore wool for warmth, and in the meshes of vests they clung tenaciously, multiplying themselves with restless energy, in a myriad shining specks, which as eggs within a few hours hatched, and tramped the fair countryside of a clean British body. It was with no boastful cynicism that men declared that these pests formed fours and were marshalled by a sergeant-major, attacked in skirmishing order, and then threw in strong reserves to rout an exhausted defence.

The bayonet, whose use for its proper purpose now seemed remote, was enlisted to defeat this bitter and relentless enemy. It was heated over braziers, and so, drawn across a vest, slaughtered its tens of thousands.

And as its point was pushed up the pleats of kilts we could hear the popping of gross bodies, the sergeant-majors, and the crackle of other ranks as they fell to the hot thrust.

But no man, except he be a whole time worker, toiling through the night and day, could ever hope to defeat so numerous and malignant an enemy. It cheered me as much to hear from a prisoner waylaid in "No Man's Land" that the German invaders of Flanders were in like plight as it did to learn from a communiqué early in March that the British attack at Gallipoli was proving successful. Lice! Verily the Egyptians knew no plagues if they knew not Flemish lice.

The War in all its stages gathered together a curious assortment of men in a company headquarters. In front of Houplines we were not to be denied some attempt at comfort. Between our other duties we officers worked unremittingly upon a great excavation, well fashioned with mud settees around it, and even a crazy chair or two from the village. It was well roofed with barn doors, and was a Paradise compared with the soaking hovel which we had endured for the first week of sojourn in this watery, willowed, wilderness. In this new house were gathered a country gentleman with parochial affairs as the urge to a useful existence; a professor of biology at Oxford; a stripling from Sandhurst; a lad who had not yet thought beyond house parties; a law student of brilliant academic attainment, and myself who had footslogged in India and Africa. We filled in the hours of boredom with debate upon the widest range of subjects. And sometimes, as they do in the House of Commons, one or another would fall asleep. They have no braziers burning the carbon dioxide fumes of coke in the House, or surely even more would sleep. We learned to tolerate any inconvenience, even lice, for the sake of warmth. Thus does human nature, hard put to it,

reassert its essential animalism, and seek first food, even unending bully beef with plum and apple jam, and then warmth.

We had much time for reading. There were so many whose education, occupation, and business had neither stimulated the desire nor provided its opportunity, that contact with the minds of University students raised fresh horizons of literary interest. I discovered a new joy in the breadth and distinction of both modern poetry and prose. Although the daily newspapers, almost without interruption, arrived with the mail every day, the semi-official reports upon happenings of war we ignored. Only of current war literature did we study the Casualty Lists, and the Intelligence Summaries issued by the Staff, later invariably referred to as "Comic Cuts." War literature was not for us. The efforts of most of the War Correspondents, too, necessary and invigorating propaganda as their columns were for those at home, became nauseating with their superlatives of sentiment and heroism.

Every battle was "an epic" of victory.

Art, in the form of the cartoon, however, carried its message even to the trenches, not least because those to whom the work was entrusted were supreme as draughtsmen.

The work of Louis Raemaekers, a Dutchman, illustrating the findings of Lord Bryce's Committee on German outrages and German breaches of Article 47 of the Rules of War, must have its place in the history of the Great War. Notable was the cartoon, "The Shields of Rosselaere," subscribed: "It is proved that the rules and usages of war were frequently broken, particularly by the using of civilians, including women and children, as a shield for advancing forces exposed to fire." And "We find many well-established cases of the slaughter of quite small children." Raemaekers did not aim at sensation, but his pictures possess extraordinary drama. That titled "The Real Thing," and subscribed "How often in the midst of a charge in peace I have caught the yearning cry of a comrade, 'Donnerwetter! If only it were the real thing!'"—The Crown Prince." And there was the "Edith Cavell" cartoon, in which the uniformed Kaiser, seated behind a curtain, leers to his Chief-of-Staff, saying, "Now you can bring me the American protest"; and that of the hideous Satan beneath Bernhardt's injunction, "War is not merely a necessary element in the life of nations, but an indispensable factor of Kultur," to which Satan rejoins, "I cordially endorse that observation."

But most notable, perhaps, was that titled "Kultur has passed here," subscribed with an extract from the Kaiser's historic

address, the flamboyant farewell to the German Expeditionary Force sent to quell the Boxer Rebellion in July 1900 : " Let all who fall into your hands be at your mercy. Just as the Huns a thousand years ago under Attila gained a reputation in virtue of which they still live in historical tradition, so may the name of Germany become known." Against the background of a flaming homestead, the stripped figures of a woman and her child are shown lying slaughtered on the ground.

The word " Hun " was not generally adopted by the troops, although by the Press it was used in the early stages of the War as generic term for the enemy. The Air Force employed the word, however, throughout. It was first used in reference to the Germans by Rudyard Kipling in " The Rowers," published in *The Times* in 1902, when Germany sought to embroil Britain with the United States over the Venezuela Border question. The enemy, both in the mass and individually, were usually referred to as " Gerry " ; though a high proportion of officers with at least a bowing acquaintance with the French language, which they could exploit upon the civilian population, adopted the French generic term, namely, " Boche," from which, with both French and Belgians, there was no variation. The Staffs, with scarcely an exception, referred to the enemy as " the Boche."

Other cartoonists, whose work during the War period was remarkable and impressive, were Bernard Partridge, who provided the classic cartoons for *Punch* ; and Captain Bruce Bairnsfather. The drawings of the latter were an astonishing mirror of the Warrior's mind. The most famous was that of a soldier in a shell-hole under bombardment : " If you know of a better 'ole . . ." At moments of shell tempests, and of discontent with billeting, the solemn repetition of this phrase always recalled the cartoon, and re-established a fatalistic contentment.

My baptism of fire was rather one of mud. This was the experience, also, of great numbers of men joining the British Expeditionary Force for the first time in Picardy and Flanders. When the first Divisions were flung into battle in August 1914 at Mons, the men received a very vivid impression of the baptism of fire, as did also reinforcements at Loos, the Somme, and in any of the great battles on the Western Front, wherein they received the physical and mental shock of total immersion in a maelstrom of shot and shell. I possess no such vivid recollection, my experience of the earlier war, to which I grew accustomed, being one of trench routine with its sordid casualties. High Wood, on the 15th of July, 1916, was for me the first ordeal by battle.

CHAPTER III

WEATHER, WAR, AND SACRIFICE

NOVEMBER—DECEMBER 1914

Trench defence—"Jumpiness"—Spies—Reliefs—Waterlogged trenches
—An unwritten armistice—Breastworks—Machine-guns and
grenades—Life and death of a soldier.

IF I should die, think only this of me :
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed ;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware ;
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.¹

OUR Brigade, the Nineteenth, was unattached. We named it "French's flying Brigade," so often had it been hurried from point to point, carried up and down the battle line in motor buses to stem the tide. These latter even a decade later are prehistoric, the megatheriums of public utility transport. But from the streets of London, still plastered with advertisements, came the fleet of the London General Omnibus Company. The Brigade was well knit, too. Cockneys, Welch and Jocks. The record of that second phase in Flanders possesses little enough of the glamour of war.

The winter war of 1914-15 is a tale of dangerous wading and groping.

One night in November an attack took place upon our front. I was on watch, walking the trench line, passing a word with my sentries, or peering across the sandbags into impenetrable darkness. There was nothing to see, inky blackness. Yet I felt there was movement in front, beyond the meshes of wire. Instinct, sense. Perhaps even the eye could focus some dim shape, or shapes, new and strange, darker, more solid than the dark background. There was no time in which to determine the matter.

¹ From "The Soldier," by Rupert Brooke.

The sentry on my right fired once ; then emptied the contents of the magazine. I ran up and down the trench crying "Stand to !" The fire was taken up along the line. Bullets whistled back. A working party among the turnips in the rear flung themselves headlong into the trench. It was not panic, but thoughtlessness and the feeling of futility in this pall of black which made them abandon rifles and equipment laid out beside the task. There was an enquiry later and severe admonitions for those responsible. "A Hell of a strafe."

The British soldier in slumber sleeps like the dead. We, on watch, kicked hard, but it was many minutes before the parapet was manned. I gave the order for controlled volley fire by sections, while I tried to fire a rocket. The ammunition was damp. Someone sent up a light from a flank, and showed for a moment some figures crouching in "No Man's Land" from whence came the cry "Cease fire." It was of German origin. That was certain. A bluff. We redoubled our efforts. Small Arms Ammunition-boxes were dragged open and we poured fire into the space between the lines. Then rifles began to jamb with mud-covered cartridge cases. Men cursed. Not a light showed from the German side. No attack developed.

Then suddenly a stream of rockets white and green went up from along the whole German front, followed on the instant by the swish, crack, and thud of machine-gun and rifle fire. I yet could discern still figures in front of the wire. They were there in the morning, four of them, dead Germans. I suspect a patrol which had lost its way. And as we called "Cease fire," after what was rather a panicky business, something hit my thumb with a sledge-hammer blow. Blood poured. Shrapnel was singing and bursting overhead. But not for long. The enemy had as little to waste as we ourselves.

I learned : we all picked up some hints from that first experience. If the Germans had attacked that night, we should have been discovered with one Company unarmed, many rifles jambed, and scarcely a round of ammunition left in the trench. It was good to learn one's lessons easily, unlike the cream of British youth, who first tasted battle at Loos and on the Somme. How bitter for them ! There was an enquiry later—"Rotten fire control" was the verdict, and very justly so.

The "jumpiness" was, I think, in large measure due to the close proximity of the civilian element to our lines. Flemish peasants did not welcome invasion. British billeting was an annoyance equal with the threat of Germany. We were

disturbers of peace, aliens. Even good money and rich reward for small services and produce proved no compensation for this disturbance to the placid peace of rural life. Dark, unfriendly looks were all-sufficient to induce suspicion.

Everyone became a potential spy. It was said that the farmer who followed the white Percheron along the furrow directed German gun fire. The pigeons which flew aimlessly from the barn top were carriers with information of our billeting and reliefs. Certainly, there was much to arouse suspicion. New billets, battalion headquarters were a sure mark for the earliest visitation from German shells. Most of us felt, I think with some justification, that those behind us were as hostile as the enemy in front. Certainly the work of espionage in those days, if extensively practiced, was infinitely easy, whether the spies masqueraded in British uniforms or as civilians.

Standing orders in relation to the civilian element had been issued only in respect of a war of movement. Orders forbade interference with the inhabitants. And war had been defined by no less an authority than Henderson in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* as first and foremost a matter of movement. Here was stagnation. Weeks, months of immobility. And so farmers and shopkeepers clung tenaciously to their homes, and among them the informers. I fear some innocents suffered at the hands of angered soldiers. But I know we caught one spy in the village of Bois Grenier.

Relief followed relief. Middlesex by Argylls ; Argylls by Middlesex. Five days in and five days out. Five days fighting the slithering mud, fighting cold, fighting lice and rats. Five days then in which the body and clothing were cleaned and the man exercised. We bathed in the great vats of an abandoned brewery in Erquingheim, a round dozen together. A squad from the Royal Engineers were in charge of this performance, filling the vats with warm water. Then, to rid ourselves of the oft-used communal water with its soapsuds, we shivered beneath the feeble squirting of a punctured two-inch pipe suspended from the roof. Shirts and underclothes were taken away and replaced by others washed and dried. Yet with what dismay did man part with a long-tailed soft flannelly "greyback" to receive in its place a stiff-baked, colourless, shrunken effigy. Perhaps there remained in its hardness some compensation for that maddening moving so-close companion of days and nights. But within a day or two this poor replica would serve as the recruit depôt for fresh battalions.

"Tak this wee shirt awa ! Gie me ma ain," cried the cheated Jocks. But no plaintive cry even from a man half-naked as he stood before these unblushing *blanchisseuses* could move them to compassion.

The Sappers ushered along the protesting men to another department of this laundry improvised to meet the exigencies of war. Here behind trestle tables stood stout-armed Belgian girls, hot iron in one hand, a skewer in the other. No Institute of Industrial Psychology was needed to train the girls in their duties. Two Sappers organized and directed the workshop practice. Like lightning a hot skewer sped up the kilted pleats searing its farthest recesses : then out again carrying its load of dead and wounded lice. Wielded overarm the iron came down like a sledge-hammer upon the remains. Thus twenty women with the precision of machines, thrust and slammed kilt after kilt. And Jock got his own back, even with a fleeting smile, as the worker for an instant lifted an eye and handed back so strange a nether garment. The jest never wearied in all the months of war.

Soldiers sampled "vin rouge" and "vin blanc" in all the estaminets. Since the lawful occupations of men and women had ceased, every house became a wine shop, labelled "Estaminet," and vending, besides beverages, eggs at famine prices. The wines were of some parentless vintage, and often presented man with the belly-ache, such gripes as curled him up in an agony of torture. Then, unwary fellow, he would sometimes mix his drinks, pouring a potion of cognac into his inwards to cure the pain. Perhaps such drastic treatment eased the stomach, but it set the brain on fire.

Our warriors out of Glasgow with those from Greater London and the Welsh coalfields, unused to the customs of Continental Europe, learned some bitter lessons. But we dealt with them in kindly fashion, even when wild intoxication sent them reeling to their barns or when they missed parading for the trenches. Sympathy, tolerance, and some knowledge of the frailty of human nature were needed in those days. The charge for failure to parade was that of "desertion upon active service in that he failed to appear at the appointed place . . ." The punishment—death. But though men sometimes faced the tribunal of a Court Martial on such a charge, we know that, however willing the spirit, the flesh was weak when soaked with the wines of Flanders. Belgian beer, in great bottles, was no substitute for an accustomed half-ale. No bite, no body. So if men erred in new-found libations, they learned their lessons.

So it was that the rum issue throughout those winter months became for all men the high peak of happiness. Even so tiny a tot, but a thimbleful, meant more than a beaker of champagne, more than the wine of Paradise.

And then five days as watchkeepers of the waterworks. For the holding of the Allied line before Armentières at this season had degenerated to little else. By early in December, due to ceaseless rain, the fields were water-logged, and the ditches several feet deep in slush. The River Lys, whose tributaries so abundantly fed the root and cereal crops, had flowed over its banks, and the rivulets followed the lead of their parent.

The Brigade line of defence had moved a few miles farther south towards La Bassée, and now stretched between the Rue de Bois and the Grande Flamengrie Farm, lying east of Bois Grenier. Already the village of Rue de Bois had ceased to mean anything other than a pile of sandbags facing one another, at this point, only forty yards apart. The Flamengrie Farm was still an outer shell of masonry, a fair mark for German gunners, but possessed of stout cellars. Battalion Headquarters were situated in another farm about a mile behind the line, as yet little disturbed by shell fire. It was christened Ration Farm, for in its courtyards the Quartermasters of the Brigade met each night to take their allotted portion from the supply wagons of the Brigade. A former garden, beneath the farm walls already was a cemetery of some size for the use of the Brigade. With each relief the incomers could note how its numbers grew.

Observation by aeroplanes began to increase, although it was a rare day on which more than one hovered over the lines. When working parties collected tools at Ration Farm there were wild scurrings into its barns and cellars when aircraft appeared ; and it was many weeks before Infantry were instructed to determine a Hun machine from one of the heavy buses in which in those days the Royal Flying Corps rode to war.

Battalion Headquarters was connected with the line by a single alley-way, deep furrowed across the sodden fields. All attempt to keep this ditch free from water was soon abandoned, though every artifice of drainage, even the construction of weirs and sluices had been attempted by amateur engineers, with growing experience in such schemes. For most of its length this communication trench was waist-high with water. When summoned to Headquarters for what, as in Aldershot days, was still named a "powwow," I took off my boots and hose, securing the former with their laces round my neck, then draped the kilt

as a cloak over my shoulders ; and holding my shirt high, I waded through thick slime to hear the wisdom of those who presided over the destinies of the Battalion.

We were obliged to make frequent appearances in full view of the enemy. This was occasioned by the demands of sanitation as well as by the necessities of both work and communication. Not only did the topography suggest that the Germans were in like plight, but there was the evidence of pumps and buckets gushing water over the parapet. They possessed a slight advantage, for the ground from our trenches rose a few feet towards the German line. Their position was of little tactical advantage, and one which I doubt they had visualized when they halted on the lower slopes of the Radinghem Ridge. But it seemed to serve them a slight advantage. We were so preoccupied with the task of keeping the water at a sufficiently low level to prevent the body being lifted through fault of its specific gravity, to the level of the turnip-tops around, that a rifle was seldom fired from our line, except in retaliation, while the guns preserved their silence. Troops so unwarlike on their front did not, however, immediately deter the enemy, and they sniped us unmercifully with shell and bullet.

On our left, with the object of giving them a taste of Western warfare, a battalion of Sikhs from the Indian Corps was introduced. One night a shell strafe descended on the line. While we cowered in the water, taking such defence as was possible against shrapnel, we were certain that the enemy would never be so foolish as to desire to capture and consolidate the British waterworks with their own. Not so the Sikhs. They manned the parapet, firing volleys at the shrapnel as it burst in the air. Bewildered because they were unable to prevent the frightfulness, and unaccustomed to such warfare, they beat a hasty retreat to the zone of familiar things in rear. No German crossed to view the vacant trenches ; and rains, without cessation, continued to fall.

Our chief care was a great buttress banking a stream which flowed from the German line, across "No Man's Land," and through our own. This swollen rivulet was worth a thousand men and many guns to the enemy. The point at which the stream severed our trench system was often shelled. But the dam held. So long as this was so the ditch called "Willow Trench" was possible habitation. Scratched from its front side were miserable cubby holes and shanties in which men slept, and arms and ammunition were kept.

One night as I dozed I was suddenly awakened by a cry "The dam's burst!" A light sleeper I leapt from the hole, meeting a flood wave of water. The sentries struggled against its weight to warn other sleepers. In a moment the trench was parapet high in water, and the trench, as a lake, at one with the fields around. Many men, kiltless, and without arms, struggled out of the ditch, but some were already drowned before aid could be brought to them. In the pitch darkness we tore at the roofs of bivouacs in the hope of rescuing men imprisoned by the weight of water and that of heavy doors and mud which formed a covering to storehouses and sleeping chambers. As bodies were brought out we tried to revive them by artificial respiration. Who, indeed, had ever dreamed in August 1914 that such aids would be needed to support the life of Infantry in war? Desperate measures were taken to recover arms and ammunition. Men dived into that swirling muddiness groping for rifles, but especially to retrieve that one old Maxim gun on which the defence so much relied.

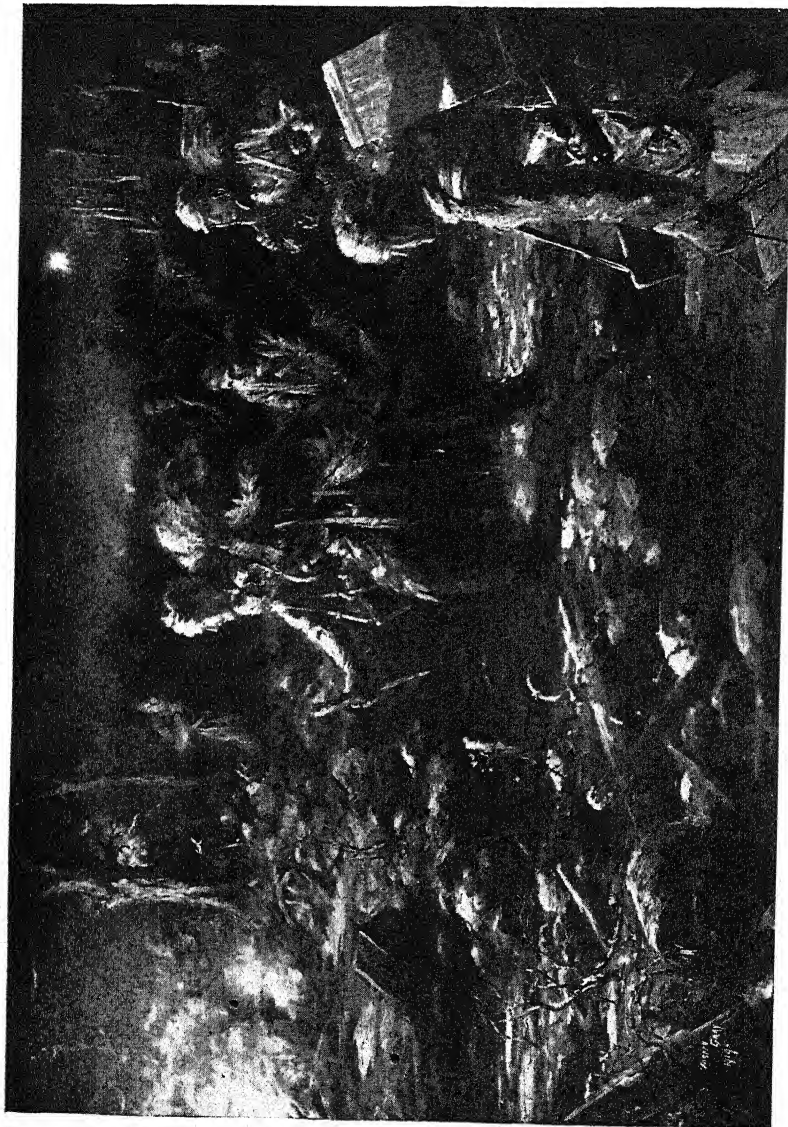
The British line had disappeared.

The garrison remained, as sorry a soldiery as ever fought beneath the Union Jack. Owing to sickness among the officers a subaltern, myself, commanded both the garrison and the front. Common sense and tactics might have dictated a retreat under cover of the night to some better line, leaving outposts in the gaunt ruins of Flemish homesteads. But the theme of the "Thin Red Line" was strongly ingrained. The French tongue, too, had imprinted its military synonym. "*J'y suis. J'y reste.*"

So dawn found my forlorn, half-naked, nearly frozen company squatting on what had been the parapet. I had reported our plight by runner. The doctor, gallant fellow, had journeyed to the line accompanied by a runner bearing a rum jar. My losses were beyond medical aid, but the rum accomplished miracles. And then the medical officer left us hugging a soused Maxim gun, with most of the men re-armed, if unclothed.

Discipline, but not hope, kept us at our posts. The stimulation of rum having sunk through the soles of our boots, I confess to having evil forebodings of what the German snipers would do. We were fair game even for poor shots. And though we had thrown up some kind of cover to shield us from view by utilizing ammunition-boxes and the tops of bivouacs, the defence was a crazy one against rifle fire.

But as I watched the pale sun lift above the ragged Radinghem



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" RATION PARTY "

From the painting by Joseph Gray.



* A

THE UNWRITTEN ARMISTICE ON THE WESTERN FRONT, CHRISTMAS AND
NEW YEAR 1914

*Waterlogged trenches have been abandoned. Working on the new breastwork line in a turnip field.
The German line, 150 yards distant, is seen in the background.*



* A

UNDER SNOW, CHRISTMAS 1914

Completed breastwork carried out during the informal armistice.

Ridge, and its watery beams lighted the enemy front, a strange and joyful sight met my anxious gaze.

The Germans squatted also like ducks on the farther side of "No Man's Land." It was irresistible. I waved. Someone waved back and hulloaed. My limbs were stiff and cold. I told my friendly batman to take a sight along his rifle, and make sure of his man. But at his peril not to fire unless a shot came from the other side. Then I got to my feet slowly, deliberately, and stretched my limbs in the morning air. Those on the other side rose also from their cramped position. Then we all stood up, looking at one another across the sodden field separating the two greatest European nations locked in deadly conflict. Movement began. I gave orders that some kind of better cover be made, and the work of salvage go on, while a sharp look out be kept. A red-whiskered veteran sergeant took command, while I hurried across the fields to Ration Farm to report this new phenomenon to my Battalion Commander. The Brigade Commander was informed, and to satisfy curiosity, a party from the farm accompanied me to the old line.

The Sergeant, resourceful ever, had already instituted a new system of watch. Sentries had been mounted as in peace time, and one with rifle and bayonet at the slope, with bare thighs and wagging shirt tail squelched a regulation beat along the front. As he caught sight of the Colonel from the corner of a watchful eye he halted, faced front and presented arms. For a moment I felt that the World War had ended. The sentry paced on. We ignored the enemy: they forgot our existence. My Company was replaced to refit, the relief marching up to its bivouacs, and taking over the guard.

Thus commenced an unwritten armistice covering a front of some miles. A hard frost set in with some snow. The Engineers were busy. Breastworks were to replace waterworks. While in rest, the nightly duty was to carry up to the front line hurdles, wire, and the sides, lid and back of wooden hencoops for human occupation in the breastwork. The plan reminded me of engravings of the Crimea in an old volume.

Hurdles were placed and wired into position, then heavily staked. Against these, men digging from the front threw great piles of soil. Every twelve yards, square traverses were constructed and in each bay two hencoops were fitted into this elongated mud castle. The work went merrily forward with no interference from the enemy. We used to view one another's labours through field-glasses, while on our left at Rue de Bois,

the opposition works were so close to each other that the working parties crossed in "No Man's Land." Peace proceeded apace.

First an exchange of souvenirs, buttons and caps. Then a bold corporal of my Regiment went to the German lines, was there entertained, and returned smoking a cigar. Hammers and mallets became mutual property and were shared by both sides. We sang for them, they for us.

To our immediate front were the 133rd and 134th Regiments of the XIXth Saxon Corps. There was a general feeling abroad that Prussia was the "bad boy" of the piece, while Saxons were at least half English—Anglo-Saxons—and had been forced by Prussia into war with their blood brothers. In those early days the ethnographical composition of the Reich was wholly unknown to British soldiers. The enemy were Prussians: no one knew of Bavaria, Wurtemberg, Hanover, Silesia. Here were Saxons, friendly people who swapped buttons for badges, cigars for cigarettes.

No Battalion can be recruited in the City of Glasgow without its strong quota of football enthusiasts. The rival claims of the Clydebank and Partick clubs were always subject for vigorous debate. We had with us representatives of both teams, while on the other side were men who had played for the Leipzig team visiting Glasgow during the previous season. The occasion of cessation from active war was an invitation to a football match to be played in "No Man's Land." The plan was eagerly fostered.

But, somewhere away behind, the High Command had heard of the peace established in the Bois Grenier Sector.

Orders were received, about which there could be no equivocation, that warlike measures against the enemy must be adopted forthwith.

Nevertheless, we could not terminate so pleasant a peace without finding a formula, British and characteristic, with which to clothe an ultimatum. With memories of the South African War, a variety of suggestions was put forward. No man brought up in the main channel of the English tradition could on the morrow have hidden behind the breastwork while he hosed the German working parties with a machine-gun, or potted at them with a rifle as if shooting rats in a hen run. We must declare our intentions with some formality. A letter was therefore drawn up, very formal in tone, in which it was announced that "war will be declared at 10 a.m. to-morrow morning." The letter was handed by the Sergeant of the Guard to a German *Feldwebel*

directing the erection of wire entanglements in front of the German breastwork. He disappeared from view, carrying the letter presumably to the officer commanding the 134th Saxon Regiment. During the night we completed our arrangements, with a view to sitting down again to the warfare of sniping, bombing, patrols, and walking in a crouched position. A survey of our breastwork from the front during the night discovered for me that in some cases the candle-light inside the human hen-coops could be seen from the front. The breastwork was therefore further strengthened.

Dawn found the German working parties as before, unconcernedly engaged at their work, while we ourselves, in fulfilment of orders, now huddled behind the breastwork, keeping periscope observation of the German line. As ten o'clock approached we shouted to the enemy to take cover. No heed was paid to our cries. At ten o'clock I called to the German troops in their own language to retire, warning them that if they did not do so immediately we would be obliged to open fire. No one obeyed my summons, and the hammering of stakes and the stretching of wire continued. I appealed to a senior Company Commander for instructions. It went wholly against tradition to open fire on apparently peaceful, and certainly unarmed German soldiers. There is little doubt that this was a German ruse to test the British aggressive intentions. From conversations with Saxons on our front we had learned that they confidently expected a German victory within six months. It is not improbable that the Germans considered that the "Contemptible Little Army" was already war-weary, and would prolong the irregular armistice for as long as they themselves were prepared to accept its conditions.

We debated the matter; and it was agreed that a jam-pot bomb should be thrown near, but not too near, to the German working party, with the object of frightening the men. A young subaltern, newly joined, was entrusted with the task. We gathered round the periscopes to obtain a view of the result. In order to take care that no one was hit the lad raised himself above the parapet and gently lobbed the bomb. It exploded, wounding a German in the leg. He yelled with agony. Within a few seconds the working party had scuttled for safety behind their breastwork. But at the same moment, when we were off our guard, the unfortunate bomb thrower was shot through the head and dropped dead. The working party was but a screen of some hazard for offensive intentions.

Simultaneously with the killing of the subaltern a hail of rifle and machine-gun fire swept the parapet and the air was filled with hostile riflery.

It had seemed that the British breastwork was better conditioned than that on the German side ; but we discovered that the back of the latter had been well revetted with concrete, while our own was but a crude affair of mud relying upon willow hurdles for support. During the afternoon the Germans tested the strength of our handiwork by firing salvoes of shells at intervals along its length. Within an hour there were several large gaps. We called upon our gunners for retaliation, but then the concrete declared itself. No gaps were made in the German breastwork. They were satisfied in a knowledge of our weakness ; and during the further occupation of the breastwork they did not again shell it, for retaliation was unpleasant.

A few feet above ground, instead of being below its level, we were back again to the warfare of sniping, machine-gun bursts by night, and patrols.

Some scientific advance had, however, to be made to cope with a war which had degenerated to one so out of keeping with its definitions. Henderson's masterly analysis¹ had defined war firstly as a matter of movement. Here was stagnation. The factories of Erith produced first a new model of the old Maxim gun. To provide for mobility it was considerably lighter, the loss of weight being achieved by replacing the heavy brass water-jacket for cooling purposes by one made from fluted gun-metal. The principle of the mechanism was not changed, though the inversion of the mechanical motion, together with minor changes, secured greater smoothness in fire. It may be remarked that this type of machine-gun, first introduced in January 1915, was retained until the Armistice, and still remains the pattern used in the British Army. With considerable experience of machine-guns of all types, the Hotchkis, the Madsen, the Mitralleuse of France, the Lewis, and those used by Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and the Maxim pattern, I remain convinced that the Vickers-Maxim for all purposes is the most reliable and effective weapon, especially for the arming of a citizen army which at the best can only have a short period of training prior to military action.

Considerable encouragement was given to bombing, and bomb schools were formed, and Brigade Bombing Officers appointed. The first essay was in the use of old jam-pots filled with scrap

¹ *The Science of War*, by Colonel G. F. R. Henderson, C.B.



✱ A



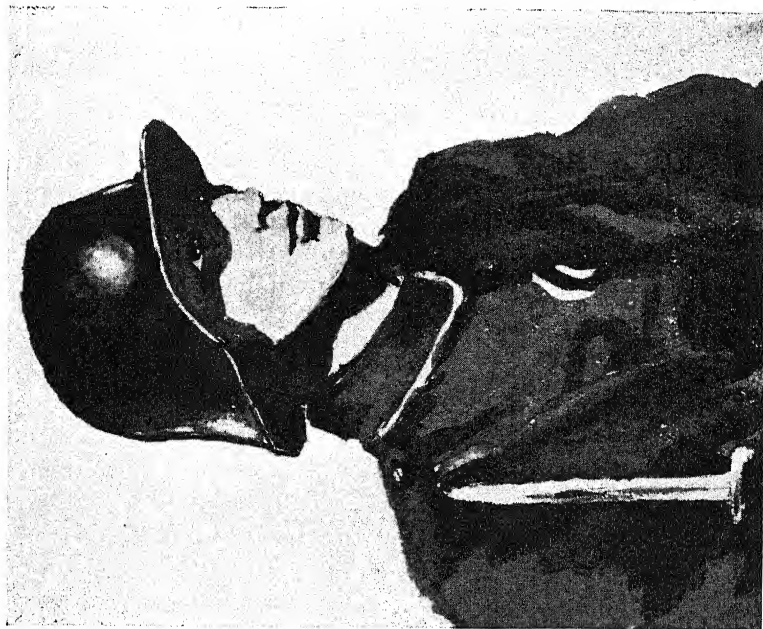
✱ A

ABOVE: MACHINE-GUN FIRE ACTION

*First Vickers gun with 93rd Highlanders on parapet of breastwork line before Bois Grenier
January 1915.*

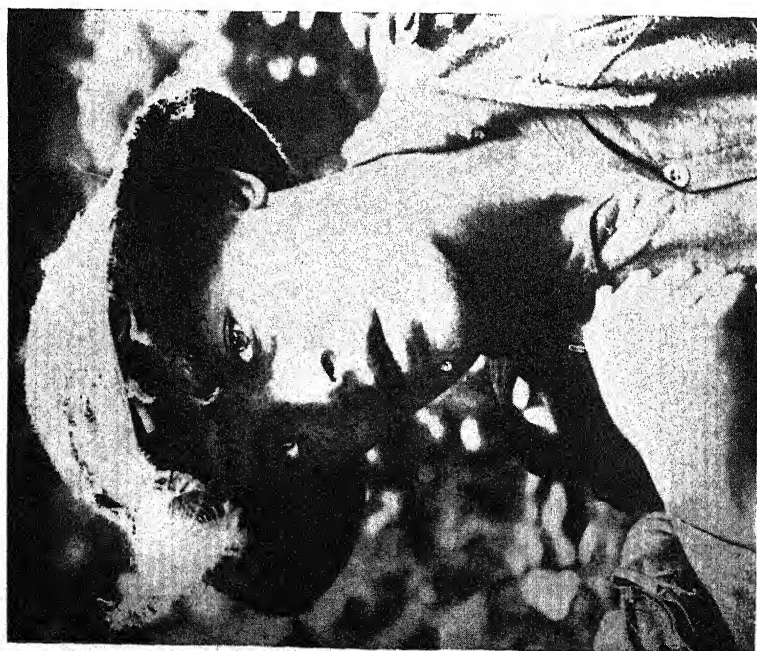
BELOW: THE MAXIM GUN

Instructing reservists in mechanism behind the lines, Chapelle d'Armentières, Christmas 1914.



A

TYPICAL GERMAN SOLDIER, STORM TROOPS,
14TH JÄGER REGIMENT



*

GERMAN PHOTOGRAPH OF BRITISH SOLDIER,
PRISONER OF WAR

Described as characteristic and typical of English type.

metal, nails, and fitted with a detonator. These were projected by hand where the German trenches, as was often the case, approached within throwing distance. Crude catapults, reminiscent of the Roman wars, were also made for the purpose, a system of elevation being introduced after experiment for the purpose of projecting the bombs approximately to any given distance within range. There followed the rifle grenade, a most dangerous thing with which to play. A steel rod carrying the grenade was thrust down the barrel of the rifle, itself being fixed to a stand. As the use of rifle grenades probably inflicted as many casualties on our side as among the enemy, its use became unpopular and it disappeared. But it was replaced by a grenade of similar principle. The grenade was fixed to a wooden stick, to the end of which was tied a tape some two feet in length, the purpose of which was to act as the tail to a kite. Some skill was required in throwing these grenades lest the tail become entangled with the fingers, or caught up in the parados, or even entwined in the legs, when, the pin of the fuse being withdrawn, the grenade would explode at close range instead of, like shrapnel, above its objective. The British stick-bomb, a very poor precursor of the German type, familiar in the later stages of the War, was eventually withdrawn entirely, and the only bomb used by British troops was the Mills, operating on the principle of a fuse, thrown by hand, and of the size of a small orange, oval in shape. Later, in addition to the stick bomb, the Germans introduced one, egg-shaped, rather larger than a golf-ball.

By early 1915 it had already been found that the bayonet possessed few merits either for attack or defence in trench warfare, though it served admirably as a toasting-fork. For aggressive measures sharp shooting was assiduously fostered, while for defence greater reliance was placed upon the machine-gun of heavy pattern, for at this date no automatic rifle had been evolved. In each platoon men were trained to throw, even to manufacture, jam-pot bombs, and to project the stick bomb. At the same time the first periscopes for observation purposes were issued to troops in the line. It had been learned that most casualties, except those due to sickness and occasional shell fire, resulted from sentries on watch being struck in the head by snipers' bullets. Periscopes of various patterns were sent, therefore, into the trenches for examination and report. The first, constructed by the Royal Engineers behind the line, were long wooden boxes containing mirrors set at an angle. These were too large and frequently were shot away. They were followed

by a general issue of small mirrors to be attached to the bayonet end. A very common sight early in 1915 was that of lines of men seated on the fire step, cushioned against sandbags, gazing into these little mirrors set on the parapet. Thus they whiled away the boredom of an afternoon.

There was nothing eventful to be seen in these mirrors. Just "No Man's Land," sometimes a field of turnip-tops and beyond it a wriggling sand-bagged parapet; or, where the trenches were close to one another, a filthy ditch filled with tins and refuse, with stacks of barbed wire hanging crazily on wooden stakes. Nevertheless, unceasing examination of this barren expanse showed sometimes the appearance of a fresh sandbag, a slight change in position of a mud heap, perhaps a bobbing head, or water thrown over the top. Then, with the Sherlock Holmes sense highly developed, from the evidence we would devise a theory, and assume certain new works or armaments on the part of the enemy. Often in such deductions the assumption was correct, as we discovered when we had trained a machine-gun and fired by night: a cry of agony was heard, and the devastated work appeared in the morning. But as warfare it was all rather childish, and carried out rather to defeat boredom than with any objective to defeat the enemy.

Such sniping and harassing operations brought to our own ranks their own toll of tragedy. Almost every casualty in those early days carried its own peculiar pathos. Death was still rare. Many men had known one another's families in and around the regimental recruiting district, and had served and worked together for years.

Early in March I lost my own batman, shot by a sniper. The loss of his devotion smote me sorely.

He lies now in Ration Farm Cemetery; the war name still persists. And this quiet place is near to La Chapelle d'Armentières—Chapelle—which links his spirit with a serene holiness which was its fitting birthright, and—Armentières—with that light-hearted gaiety, his very soul, which will sing so long as war songs are with us.

He is near to the place where he fell; but he will remain with me to the end. He was a stripling, who was taken quickly, perhaps to a better counsellor than myself. Who knows? Whom the gods love. . . . But in those days we were all young; and perhaps, too, we who remain may have left our youth behind—a lost generation. Beneath a rugged exterior, yet roughly tender and bravely beautiful, he possessed a spirit, which, like many

others now passed on, in its perfect example will abide for all time with the living.

I will tell the story of that laddie so you may know something of the sons the people gave as soldiers. Mostly these were lads taken from mean streets, from the squalor of great cities. They have hearts of gold. But perhaps it is in a mother who has given and lost everything that you may discover the secret of a son's loveliness. She wears a crazy bonnet, her clothes are of no period or style ; her hands shake to a cup of tea ; she is bent with unceasing toil ; her beauty is despoiled by want and watching, and yet remaining in all its serenity. She is stricken with poverty, bowed with age, rendering a thousand services to those whose burdens may be greater than her own. She consoles the griefs of a score of neighbours and yet her own grief in its silence and hopelessness is greater than any other. And when you see a thousand lads stepping forth like gods to war, remember the mother ; and when those lads do not return, as they will not, many of them, do not forget that little figure in a crazy bonnet who in a garret in some mean byway may bear the burden of many others as the cloak for her greater grief.

Beyond his suckling Peter, my batman, never knew a mother ; but a father he remembered, someone who had taken the little fellow on his knee, laughed with him, led him up beside Ben Lomond overlooking the Loch, his one great friend of the past. There had been a grandmother, too, in the rugged island of Islay, swept by Atlantic storms. Peter, an orphan, without shelter or friends, was gathered from the streets of Glasgow by the kindly arms of law and charity and sent to a school, set amid green fields and rolling hills on the outskirts of the city. Here, with genial understanding, tutelage, and not unkind discipline, amid rough companionship, body and character developed. He had acquired a more than sound education, but as a piper—he led the band—and as a dancer, he shone like a star in that boyish constellation. Such schools fashion fine recruits for the bands of British regiments, and in due course a little lad, but withal a proficient piper, joined a family of eight hundred men. In such a family a cheerful countenance is a first passport to popularity, and this the lad quickly acquired, yet remained a son unspoilt.

I remember well when I first noticed him. I was whiling away an afternoon of the boredom of an orderly officer's duties, with its trivial round of inspecting cookhouses, visiting men confined in the guardroom, and mounting guard, and had strolled

in the evening on the ramparts of the antiquated fortress which stands overlooking the Moray Firth. I sat upon a moss-covered wall, and idly watched the soft lapping waves as they were swept and tumbled by an unseen hand, when my thoughts were turned by the skirl of pipes, and a piper passed behind me. He turned in his beat, and continued to pace up and down the rampart. The music was well played. I turned to view the player, and he marched on for some minutes.

Then he stopped, and stood alert before me, smiling. "Will ye hae muir music, sirr?" the piper said. That was an unusual experience for me. I asked him his name, and some usual questions. He was pleased, and chattered away merrily, an unspoilt soul. Then his mind sped on, and he said suddenly, to finish a conversation which perhaps he felt had exceeded the courtesy of military discipline: "Noo I wull play." I watched him fill the bag and retune the pipes, his pink cheeks growing scarlet to the effort, while brown eyes, puckered in merriment, twinkled at me over the chanter. He played a solemn march, swinging his kilt with all the swagger of a pipe-major, followed by a rollicking reel in which a neat leg and toe throbbed to the excitement of the dance. "Noo I'll run, sirr," he said, in apology for an ending and dismissal; and sped away to the steps leading down to the barrack square. He wavered a moment as if in doubt, then laid down his pipes and came running back to me. "I forgot to salute ye, sirr." Then he saluted and ran, picked up the pipes, looked at me a moment, saluted again, or perhaps he waved, and bounded down the steps. During several months I saw him often after that. Despite an upbringing largely in the streets, and a life among a soldiery who swear like troopers, he possessed a most artless innocence. His belief in human charity was both astonishing and profound. He knew neither guiles nor self-seeking; he was high-spirited, imaginative. His sense of humour moved at high speed; his quaint remarks and original observations would keep me bubbling with mirth.

At war, Peter became my batman, a faithful servant, a friend and counsellor, an ever-present companion to give me confidence in the darkness of a dangerous night, and good cheer, when fortune favoured a visit to Battalion Headquarters, and a quick run along the disused tramways from Houplines to Armentières to refresh the company mess-box and perchance a bath. This last was the lad's discovery. He took me one day to a great house, in the Rue Denis. The occupants had retired to Paris, but an elderly housekeeper remained as the perfect hostess.

There was a luxurious bathroom, hot water, bath towels, and afterwards hot chocolate and biscuits in the little salon, while Madame Marle prattled of the War and of what had been before. And then one day the Germans shelled the town. The more timid shopkeepers closed their stores, and put up great shutters before the windows. Several houses in Houplines and upon the fringe of the town were hit. Bois Grenier in one day became a shambles and deserted, the dead being left where they had fallen at their daily task until extricated and buried by kindly British hands. And as I bathed, a monstrous explosion tore the side of the house, scattering glass and plaster throughout the bathroom.

One day Peter, after a venturesome journey to a farm-house almost within the lines to acquire fresh eggs, came running to tell me that a new gun, the largest he had ever seen, had been installed on the roadside beside Ration Farm. An artillery subaltern with a box periscope appeared in the lines and asked me what was the most annoying feature of the enemy's landscape. I described a house with a green shutter. He raised the periscope, and a moment later a loud crack in the air beside the periscope indicated the vigilance of a sniper from this vantage point. "Mother will blot that out in a moment," said the gunner, and telephoned to a comrade directing gunfire. We waited in excited expectancy, Peter bobbing his glengarry upon a straw-filled sandbag above the trench line to attract the prowess and ambition of the German marksman. In a moment there was a loud thud, the hiss of a passing shell ; and a cloud of pink brickdust obscured the house with the green shutter. When the cloud passed before a light wind, a ragged hole remained where the shutter had been. "Mother" had accomplished a sound spanking. Later another similar gun appeared. We gave it the name of "Baby," and both Mother and Baby did very well.

Came Christmas with gifts from the King and the card of their Majesties : "May God protect you and bring you safe home" ; boxes of chocolate from Princess Mary, monster cakes from home, and bags filled with comforts made by quiet, unassuming women who had transformed their country houses into workrooms. And there were gifts from wives and sweethearts. I bought for Peter a new pipe. He was a great pipe smoker, a fact which, in a cigarette era, was remarkable. But it was evidence of character, the desire to be regarded as a man, despite his years. Then five days' leave came to me, my first. I pleaded with the Colonel for another pass, and it was granted. Peter

came with me to the luxury of white sheets, bright firesides, warm baths and the mellow quietness of warm hearts.

There was a glorious snowy week-end with friends among the Surrey hills. Peter played his pipes during dinner and danced to make glad the heart of village children. In those days a kilted soldier was an uncommon sight away from Aldershot or Salisbury Plain. And then we journeyed back across the Channel, followed by a long day of jolting in a draughty, overladen train. At nightfall the wheezing, soot-spitting train dumped us at St. Omer, and we discovered a little hotel, its dining-room, bedrooms and couches already overfilled with officers and their batmen going to the blessed relief of leave, or returning from it ; and we pillowed our heads on packs beneath the billiard table, wrapping a blanket round us against the draught from the ever-opening door. We found the Regiment in rest billets. Peter prescribed for me and my valise, and found a bakery. There was a great warm oven in which bread for the village of L'Armée and the surrounding farm-houses was baked between the hours of four and six in the morning. Peter carried my valise and spread it upon the flour bags, as comfortable a resting-place in that welcome warmth as ever I have known.

Batmen differed from each other in the exactness with which they fulfilled their offices. Scarcely a man had been trained to the duties of such service. All good fellows, my batmen in other walks had been an insurance clerk, a foundry worker, a gas-meter collector, and a silversmith ; and those four who succeeded one another, and fell away through wounds, are back at their old trades to-day, respectively in an office in Norwich, on Clyde-bank, in the streets of Tottenham, and in a Birmingham factory. For what qualities were they chosen ? I think, cheerfulness and an unassuming friendliness which took complete possession of the necessary, though often inconvenient, affairs of life. In such things Peter's service was priceless. No matter at what hour I would return to the cubby hole for sleep, it was as dry and as warm as ingenuity could devise. Eggs and small comforts he conjured from behind the lines without any promptings from me. He would drag the lice from a kilt by inserting in its pleats a pronged fork heated in a brazier, while I made a neat report, or wrote instructions for the work after dark. He would arrange my notebook with carbonis between its pages, clean my maps and instruments ; prepare a varied menu from interminable bread, plum-and-apple jam, and the sickly meat and vegetable

ration. He would clean my limited wardrobe, wash and mend the socks and shirts, keep me supplied with tobacco, dry my boots and stockings. The batman was *multum in parvo* to his charge, omnipresent, yet ubiquitous—"Where's my shaving water?" and it came steaming in a tin mug from which he had hastily thrown his own cup of tea. "I want to wash," and two hands beneath a bowed head would bear an empty biscuit tin filled with hot water which may have taken an hour's heating over the embers of recalcitrant coke, blown to a red heat by a batman's lungs. "Find me some cigarettes." The batman would retire, take the last packet from his tunic, and return unselfishly smiling. And he would run when his officer went over the top, and fight by his side. When the officer dropped, the batman was beside him. When the batman fell he was alone.

We went back to the line on February 28. Our rôle was to fire over the breastwork to occupy the attention of German infantry and gunners, while the operation to our right flank was carried out. We spent two days in preparation. This at last was battle, or so Peter, in the innocence of his heart, thought it. There would be the whole panoply of war—men, like leaden soldiers with rifles at the shoulder, firing over the breast-high battlements. He was greatly excited. My revolver was cleaned anew, his rifle glistened with oil under the pale sun, equipment cleaned, cheeks washed and rosy in the fresh air. I made a tour of the breastwork line, along which I moved bent double lest a bullet should find my head. And little Peter followed me with quick observation, and a reminder for any part in the instructions overlooked. The sergeants and the corporals knew him. Often, unknown to me, he would go back, elucidate a point not fully grasped, and pass a wise hint to a defaulter, but he was discreet. My secrets he jealously guarded as his own, and he knew them all—the hopes, the fears, the trials and anxieties, the difficulties with a command somewhat aloof and unsympathetic, the wants and needs, the whole life from day to day of a regimental officer.

Then, on 2nd March, the hour came, and we fired furiously and aimlessly. Not a head appeared as a target, yet bullets whistled past our ears or thudded in the sand-bagged emplacement. Men began to fall shot through the head. The empty futility of the performance caught some; they sank their heads above the parapet and snapped their rifles in the air above the breastwork. I think this was wisdom, but my duty was to keep the men erect. I ran up and down behind the breastwork

prodding the men to sterner action and fiercer fire. A furious noise filled the air from our flank at La Bassée. Peter, spick and span, clean hose tops, bright cap badge and buttons, brushed as if for guard at Edinburgh Castle, ran beside me, or stood, his eyes glowing in ecstasy, beside the purring Vickers gun, the first in our possession. I ran to the field telephone to tell them at Battalion Headquarters that we were wasting life and ammunition shooting at no visible enemy ; and as I lifted the receiver, a loud crack stunned my ears. Peter fell quietly beside me, a smile still on his lips. I dropped the telephone ; the sickening shooting still went on. I held his hands a moment as a soul winged its way from that horror. Then I covered him ; there was nothing man could do. Little Peter had bidden me farewell.

Many philosophers have invested the quality of friendship with noble words. That of the batman expressed itself by little acts of vigilant kindness. Opportunities for the rendering of trifling services and for the doing of kindnesses were for ever present, every hour and every day. The batman's attitude was one of self-subordination, and he tarried neither to consider the worthiness of his charge nor the nature of the service asked. He gave freely, the man of humble origin and pursuit, to one at least temporarily exalted with authority. By his ready service, words, and gestures he won affection, by his forethought and unknown sacrifices he penetrated quietly and unobtrusively into the heart of the master of his goings and comings. And among such men Peter was incomparable—the friend in need, the friend of perfection. I knew him as one incapable of fear, of stainless honour, sincere, modest, unselfish, his mind a veritable garden of flowers in which were blooms of matchless purity and fragrance, its paths overhung everywhere with the red roses of sacrifice.

CHAPTER IV

A B C

JANUARY—OCTOBER 1915

Fire-power discussed—Training a citizen army—"Physical jerks"—
Value of inspections—Developing a "battle sense"—Maps—
Distinctive signs—Salvage—The artist and war.

I SEE them in foul dug-outs, gnawed by rats,
And in the ruined trenches, lashed with rain,
Dreaming of things they did with balls and bats,
And mocked by hopeless longing to regain
Bank-holidays, and picture shows, and spats,
And going to the office in the train.¹

THE training of the Warrior before the Great War had been confined with infantry to the rifle and the bayonet, and with cavalry to sabre and lance. As a weapon the machine-gun had been almost ignored. In the Manuals of Training, though machine-guns, two for each battalion, had their rôle, their handling was the business of experts. The machine-gun section of sixteen men from a strength of one thousand were curious enthusiasts, segregated in their work, and an embarrassing nuisance on manœuvres.

The Army was trained on the tradition of the Indian frontier and South African battles, in whose campaigns the highly trained marksman, creeping and bounding forward in extended order, was considered the best match for the Pathan or the Boer farmer. In choice of weapons we had replied to the Indian hillmen and the sharpshooter with similar tactics, attempting only to secure superiority of fire power by better training and massing on the assault line. For the final assault the army was trained to the use of the bayonet. The *arme blanche* for personal battle with the enemy was cold steel, the bayonet, sword and lance point.

In the German Army, on the other hand, machine-gunnery, controlled-fire-power in the hands of trained men, had been the

¹ From "Dreamers," by Siegfried Sassoon.

pivot of all infantry training. It is true that the astonishing discipline of the small British Army in August and September 1914, together with its capacity as riflemen to deliver accurate rapid fire, held up and destroyed many German attacks carried out in deep formation. But had the "Old Contemptibles" been equipped and trained with machine-guns it is certain they would have proved a far more formidable barrier. It was with machine-guns that the German defence destroyed and almost annihilated the British attacks at Neuve Chapelle, at Loos, and on the Somme. And it was only so late as on the Somme in July 1916 that our infantry were in any way adequately supported by these weapons. And it was not until much later that we attained superiority of the enemy.

Rifle-fire, which had brought victory to British arms in numbers of small wars in India and in Africa, was no longer effective once the highly trained marksmen had disappeared as casualties. Moreover, in trench warfare the rifle itself proved to be an inferior weapon. In the attack the rifle, whether slung or carried in the hand, was cumbersome and impeded the Warrior over rough ground, especially when attempting the passage of barbed wire. On his arrival at the objective its length was awkward, nor could man use it in the depths of a trench, either for stabbing or shooting. In defence, with men lined out along a parapet, and for this reason largely uncontrolled, the rifle was not sufficiently effective, nor was its power sufficient to stem a determined attack. Its mechanism suffered, also, from the grave disadvantage that it was easily clogged with mud and dust. The rifle-and-bayonet, in the defence of a trench against men armed with pistols, or bombs, was by the inferior altitude of its possessor a feeble weapon against an enemy attacking from the height of a parapet. Even the butt end, used as a bludgeon, was uncomfortably unwieldy and could not be swung within the narrow confines of a trench with any ease.

We were slow in our realization of the superlative value of machine-guns in defence; and, in the attack, in our appreciation of their devastating effect with overhead fire, due to the nature of the bullets' trajectory, against enemy reserves and counter-attack. Bombs came earlier. The warrior, in trench warfare, was well armed with a bagful of Mills' bombs and could move readily about his ground.

The necessity for a short-handled weapon to replace the rifle-and-bayonet in close assault produced a short-handled bludgeon, at its head a crown of steel with a spiked top. This was not taken

into general use in the Army, but was manufactured by the Royal Engineers for raiding parties and "storm troops."

It is a curious commentary that the rifle, the weapon upon which almost solely the British Army had relied, after the first few weeks of the War was discovered to be of little practical value. Although every Infantry soldier, Artillery, and Cavalry as well, was sent from the Bases to fighting formations carrying a rifle, I seldom saw it used effectively, at any rate in the mass. Indeed, upon a battlefield, the great number of rifles cast away by men to rid themselves of its inconvenience was most noticeable. They preferred to fight with bombs, hoping, without undue optimism, to find a German or British rifle at the objective for local defence and as a kind of personal guarantee and insurance policy. The general issue of automatic pistols in place of rifles would without doubt have been wisdom.

The realization of the necessity for training great numbers of men in the mechanism and tactics of machine-guns sent home from the field all those experts who, before the War, had passed through the experience of the Hythe Machine-Gun School. As one of those comparatively few, and junior officers whose services were not engaged on the Staff or in command, I found myself posted to the new A. & S. H. Depôt for reinforcements to the regular battalions, on the Braid Hills above Edinburgh.

Many of such Depôts seem to have been entrusted to the charge of retired officers, contemporarily known as "dugouts"—Heaven bless their patriotic zeal!—without experience of this new war, and many of them incapable of understanding the kind of discipline necessary to the maintenance of the spirit of citizen soldiers.

It is indisputably true that many men, especially the more cultured, suffered much spiritual agony in the days of their training for war. The beefy zeal and sarcastic, blasphemous tongue of an earlier type of N.C.O. may have been the kind of medicine to inspire the recruits for the Peninsular Wars with a proper regard for the business of battle. The "press gangs" and recruiting methods for the fighting forces of Wellington and of Nelson were none too gentle. History relates, however, that the "Nelson touch" consisted in an attitude of affectionate friendliness towards even the jail-birds who largely manned his ships, while his Midshipmen, so often referred to in correspondence with his Captains, were as his own sons.

Nelson, great Captain of the Ship of State, might well have been the pattern in leadership and control of men when Britain

sought to do on land what Nelson had accomplished at Trafalgar. The smouldering anger of many soldiers and junior officers against "command" had its source in the methods of the training camp. So deeply imprinted were the insults to outraged patriotic fervour that until demobilization so many men could only understand their Commanders, as reproductions of those of their first military experience.

So it was that the flower of English manhood, volunteers, and those who followed after, were too often subjected to outrageous harrying at the hands of military midwives, who while achieving the birth of a soldier procured an abortion of his spirit. It cannot be repeated. National Service demands other methods.

I sometimes found such conditions prevalent in the training camps where it was my duty to instruct young officers and men in the use of machine-guns. But I discovered, also, within the instant, that they rallied to a training, which though determined upon speedy efficiency, yet denied nothing in sympathy and fellow-feeling. My heart chafed at the training camp, and I was impatient with the solemn ritual of preconceived ideas governing such institutions as the mess and the orderly room, with its rows of trembling malefactors impaled before military justice for the most trivial of offences, largely committed in ignorance.

So many institutions, wholly novel to the civilian, became part of the daily routine of life, that they merit some special reference.

The "physical jerks" of pre-War Army training underwent a swift change. To recapture the joy of movement, to exult in alert muscles, to feel the joy of the healthy body, these were the desiderata. Thousands of young men, recruited from the industrial areas, poured into the training camps. Most often their appearance was that of undeveloped and unhealthy youth, unfortunately characteristic of a large part of the manhood of Britain's cities and towns. The undersized and rickety-conditioned bodies of men, for example from Manchester and Glasgow, were in poor contrast with the superb specimens from out of Australia and Canada. With rare exceptions, after three months, however, recruits emerged as masters of themselves, balanced, self-controlled, strong, their organs and muscles trained to perform their proper functions, their minds refreshed and stimulated, enabling them better to grapple with problems of war-craft, and not least with those of the art of living.

Public consciousness was brought suddenly and dramatically up against the fact that as a nation we were very far from attaining to the physical standard set by authority. The population

officially, for the most part, was one of C. 3 category. It became a matter of general observation, especially in the Kitchener Armies, that men of all ages and of every variety of occupation, experiencing and enjoying the open-air life of military games and training, after a period of a few months rapidly gained in general physique and well-being. On psychological, as well as physiological grounds there is the fullest evidence in proof that these men, even in the most trying circumstance of warfare, were stoical, if not happy, and were able to withstand the supreme rigours of winter warfare, and of privation, due to their new-found health.

Physical-training games such as basket-ball, leap-frog, high-cock-alorum, medicine-ball, and other antics, never previously learned, or left behind on a boys' playground, served youth to recapture both its health and high spirits.

In much of the drill, especially rifle exercises, there was a deadly monotony. But in "physical jerks," wherein young men were stripped to sun and wind, there was something of the spirit of old Sparta.

The experience of the South African and other wars had impressed medical authority with the supreme necessity of defeating typhoid fever, which had ravaged the armies of history. All men were, therefore, subject to inoculation with anti-typhoid serum. Both inoculation and re-vaccination were abhorrent to most soldiers, even though they were followed by some days of light duty and freedom from parade.

Nevertheless, it is to the credit of the foresight of the Medical Services that the health of the troops on the Western Front was disturbed by no outbreak of typhoid and by no other scourge.

This was due in large measure, too, to the system of physical training imposed. Both physical training, and a zealous Medical Service, made it possible for men, even gravely wounded, to survive, where a lower health standard would assuredly have cost them their lives.

For a great number it was a new thing to sleep in shirt tails in place of pyjamas. There is no room in the Infantry pack, heavy enough at fifty pounds, for the ornaments of civilization, and with these sleeping-suits were relegated to the background of the home.

A sore trial to the recruit were puttees, whose windings proved so difficult in satisfaction to the Company Officer or the Sergeant of the Guard. Puttees were not, in fact, very serviceable, and

the calf-high leather boots of German soldiers were, I think, on all accounts, preferable for an European campaign.

To such ends were inspections of kit carried that men mounting for guard, in addition to scrubbing and pipe-claying equipment, even blackened the soles of their boots.

There was something of the burlesque in many battalion inspections. Some time after the Battalion was drawn up on parade, and already had been minutely inspected by Section and Platoon Sergeants, by Platoon Officers, and by Company Commanders, the Colonel would arrive. The Adjutant would rush forward, check himself suddenly, and violently salute, shouting "All present and correct, sir." The Colonel would raise his hand in acknowledgment and pass to the inspection. Depending upon his mood, and not least upon the weather, this would be of long or short duration.

While the other Companies were stood at ease, a slow march began along the ranks of the first. Nervous men, anxious to escape the eagle eye, may perhaps have discovered some sympathy with the inspecting Commander. It is an embarrassment in a performance objectively so unfriendly as the Battalion inspection, to greet eyes rigidly fixed to the front and set jaws, while a thousand human beings, hung around with war material like Christmas trees, are possessed of warm hearts attuned by reality to that of the Colonel.

The latter proceeded on his round abreast with the Company Commander. Behind there followed a retinue of "detectives" searching for the unpolished button, the incorrectly laced boot, the missing tea from the "iron ration," the chainless cork in the water-bottle, the spot of ingrained rust on the bayonet, the too long quiff of hair, and such other trivial details. First came the Second-in-Command in company with the First Platoon Officer and the Platoon Sergeant. Then followed the Adjutant, the Regimental Sergeant-Major, the Company Sergeant-Major, the Company Quartermaster Sergeant, the Regimental Orderly Sergeant, the Company Orderly Sergeant. Behind these followed the Quartermaster with the Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant, the Orderly Room Sergeant, the Quartermaster's Clerk, whose combined business it was to note and replace deficiencies. The duty of the former group was to "Take his name, Sergeant," and to take disciplinary action, or to bring the possessor of an unshaved chin, or whatever it might be, before the Company Officer at the Company Orderly Room.

But let us not forget the value of burlesque. This performance

was continued in the field, but with a marked difference in its atmosphere. It was an opportunity for the Commander to see his men revived and rehabilitated from the ardours of battle, publicly to congratulate those whose sacrifice and zeal had been of a high order. It was an occasion, also, on which the sympathetic eye could discover an unhealthy body and a shaken spirit, and commend it for relaxation or for transfer to the home establishment. It was one on which, too, the returned sick and wounded could be welcomed, and new drafts commended both to the care of their fellows and have committed to them the honour and good discipline expected within the Unit.

Some highly strung, impatient and cynical men, who have since discoursed with much bitterness upon their experiences within the ranks, have entirely failed to grasp the essential value to the Commander, as well as to the men, with whose leadership he is entrusted, of such inspections. The battalion, the battery, the field company, or ambulance must be a family. It can be nothing else, if its work is to be faithfully and happily executed. Paternal government is the essence of happy family relationship. It inspires confidence in leadership, and is the foundation of an efficient interior economy.

Nevertheless, in the training camps undue importance was attached to the trivialities of interior economy. The minds of junior officers and N.C.O's. were far too much preoccupied with the detail of discipline, feeding, and equipment, and too little with the ingredients necessary for tactical operations.

The acquisition of such knowledge as map reading, the use of range-finding instruments, the nature and effect both of our own artillery and fuses and that of the enemy, the handling of enemy weapons, as well as the tactical considerations and appreciation of situations due to the introduction of mining, tanks, gas, flame-throwers, and other devices, were largely neglected.

Very many casualties, especially those among untried and young troops, were due to a lack of "shell-sense." Men with experience of battle learned to know from their sounds the point of explosion of enemy shells and heavy missiles. Artillery action was rarely an indiscriminate affair of wild shooting, but followed the ordered plan of spaced "searching" and "bracketting," of the "line" or "box barrage."

Moreover, each form of shell in its approach was possessed both of its own note and peculiarity. Such forms and sounds provided some warning to the initiated, and casualties could be avoided either in the passage of ground, or by taking swift cover

against flying metal, without loss of direction and objective. These matters were of the highest importance in training, but were almost neglected.

Undue accentuation was placed upon bayonet fighting, with the concurrent silly performances of instructing men to bare their teeth and utter savage cries, while attacking a filled sandbag suspended from a gibbet.

The necessity for secrecy produced a new vocabulary of words and signs, almost bewildering to the civilian. Nearly every document was headed "Secret," and on the German side "*Geheim*." Before being handed to runners or dispatch riders, these secrets, even peremptory questions concerning the number of tins, jam, plum and apple consumed, were committed to within two sealed envelopes, before being entrusted to the road.

Points of *rendezvous*, for entraining or "debussing," were indicated by the use of letters and numerals. Thus—

"The following points will be established as centres of communication as the situation develops.

Road junction K. 16. b. 7. 3. Road junction F. 25 a. 3. 4."

These indications had reference to the maps issued for general use. The work of the Field Survey Companies in the production of operation maps excelled. The maps in general use were scaled $\frac{1}{20,000}$ for operations, and $\frac{1}{40,000}$ for general movement. The use of squares for map reading made them intelligent to all ranks, where the understanding of scales and contours required something more than elementary education. All such maps were squared, each square being lettered in capitals and divided into thirty-six sub-squares, themselves again divided into four other squares lettered "a. b. c. d."

For example, on a $\frac{1}{40,000}$ sheet the side of each of the thirty-six numbered squares represented 1000 yards, and each one of the sides of the four lesser squares was 500 yards in length. A point could, therefore, be described as lying on Sheet 29 and within Square A. 16., or M. 4. b., etc.

In order to indicate an exact point for fire objective, concentration, or any other purpose, the small squares "a. b. c. d." were considered further to be divided into tenths. The point was defined by taking so many tenths from W. to E. along the Southern side, and so many from S. to N. along the Western side, the S.W. corner always being taken as origin, and the distance along the S. side being always given by the last figure.

Hence, a centre of communication would be established at K. 16. b. 7. 3. And the Reference Sheet was stated at the head of the Order.

This method simplified map reading for junior officers and soldiers possessed of only an elementary knowledge of topography; while if Operation Orders fell into the hands of the enemy, at least time was gained before he had time to interpret the numerals with a map of reference. The Germans employed a similar system, but used numerals throughout and a series of small squares.

The dictum to "mystify and mislead" was well preserved in the Quartermaster General's branch of organization behind the line. Though this statement might well apply to the brands of tobacco and cigarettes issued to soldiers in the field, I have not this especially in mind. In some Divisions metal shoulder badges and other regimental marks of identity, were removed, being replaced by pieces of coloured cloth of various shapes, sewn on the sleeves above the elbow or on the epaulets. The purpose was to make identification difficult for the enemy, and to enable troops within the same Division to recognize at some distance the various units of its composition.

Every Division was possessed of its own distinctive sign, conspicuously marked upon all vehicles, headquarters, and elsewhere. They were designed to have a distinctive meaning, which somewhat militated against the purpose, namely secrecy. But such signs provided wide scope for the decorative zeal of erst-while sign painters, whose skill was used to make wagons more beautiful.

Prior to a Horse Show at Cavillon, near Picquigny on the Somme, in early September 1916, in fulfilment of this provision for competitive decoration, my wagons were emblazoned with the double-three Domino set on a red field, the Divisional sign. But there was added, also, in heraldic form the crossed Machine-Guns and Crown of the Machine-Gun Corps crest, while, to state the spirit which animated the 100th Machine-Gun Company, to my command there was added the motto in a scroll—"Jusq' au bout." Until its merging into the Battalion, this Company was always known afterwards as the "Juski boos."

The 9th Division possessed the Scottish Thistle, and the 52nd, also Scottish, the St. Andrew's Cross. The Red Hand of the 36th Ulster Division, usually called the "Bass Boys" from the similarity of the sign to the trade mark. The 56th Division carried Wat Tyler's Sword, while the 4th Division bore the Ram's

Head from the family crest of its first Commander, Sir William Lambton.

Unusual and conforming more closely to the military purpose, were the "Eye" used by the Guards' Division ; the "Problem figure" of the 14th Division, chosen from the 14th Proposition of the First Book of Euclid ; the "Butterfly" of the 19th, and the "Bee" of the 60th Division ; and the "Broken Spur" of the 74th to commemorate its conversion from Yeomanry to Infantry for service in Gallipoli.

Army Corps, too, adopted such signs with which to decorate their headquarters, and these were mostly selected from the armorial bearings of their commanders. But when such leaders were "unstuck," "degomméd," "Stellenbosched," "Limogé," or merely promoted, reversing the habit of mediæval times, the crests of the "ungummed" remained "put."

It was customary among the Staffs to refer to the Second Army as "Plum's Army" ; to the Third as "The Byng Boys" : this from Harry Tate's hilarious act in *Business As Usual* produced at the London Hippodrome as the first War Revue ; to the Fourth as "Rawley's Army" ; and to the Fifth as "Goughie's Army." Though it is not pretended that these nicknames were purposed to deceive the enemy and his spies, it may be added that General Allenby was universally known as "The Bull" ; and among lesser commanders, whose nicknames were familiar to all ranks and tripped easily from the tongue, were "Hunter-Bunter," Sir Aylmer Hunter-Weston, who commanded the 29th Division and 8th Corps, celebrated also for certain excellent eccentricities ; and "Inky Bill," General Ingouville-Williams, who was killed in Mametz Wood in July 1916. It will be found that where such soubriquets were conferred upon lesser commanders, they were always as terms of affection, nor were they readily accorded. The personality of the man, as much as his name, invoked and prescribed a nickname.

In organization nothing seems to have been neglected. Salvage companies, very necessary too, were formed from the decrepit to gather up and stack the remains after a battle. To aid them in their duties soldiers were instructed that they must never return from the line without bringing back some castaway article to the salvage dump. The more conscientious, in consequence, provide many excellent things easily to hand for the indolent.

Nevertheless, the salvage dumps grew apace. "Hunter-Bunter," as part of his campaign of lectures upon hoardings, at every egress from the trenches in the sectors which he governed,

posed the written question, "What have you salvaged to-day?" It was "a crime" to return empty-handed. Everyone not related to the P.B.I. and the gunners was an expert. There were, in consequence, all kinds of formations and units performing a variety of no doubt useful offices. Such activities angered the Infantry, for though warriors were very tolerant of grinning Chinese coolies mending the roads for their benefit, it appeared so different when far behind the lines able-bodied British soldiers were found engaged upon a similar task.

Very few men can have seen the Official artists at work. An Official photographer, especially an Official cinematographer, by the nature of his technique and material must record truth. That is the camera's function. With the artist, everything is left to caprice. Yet it may be this very factor which can contribute to the work produced an atmosphere far more vivid and luminous, of far greater value in terms of time and space and emotion, than any pictorial record established by mechanical means. The work of the artist may possess the very quality of truth. Though few pictures are more impressive and convincing than many of the oblique photographs taken at a low altitude during attack and defence by the Royal Flying Corps, yet art, realistic or symbolic, should surpass mechanical means.

So far as technique and understandability are concerned, the War Office possesses the right to ignore or reject the claims of artists whose technique and motif, either one or both, is opposed to the spirit of victory. Officialdom, too, can prescribe the motif. A Government has the right to say "We want pictures of so and so. Go and make them." The Government expects of its artists that they will contribute their best work in the accustomed medium. Officialdom can impel nothing else. But after a war is over, the public, especially the soldiers who fought the War, have a right, one superior to officialdom itself, to accept or reject the national preservation of works so produced. Once an artist has been chosen he must be left to paint as he pleases. His technique is not the business of officialdom. But public opinion may reject the final product.

That said, there remains, especially housed in the Imperial War Museum, a great quantity of pictures and sketches. Some of the most truthful pictures were painted or drawn by men who were anything but Official artists, though the latter, unless they wished otherwise, were immune from danger, and were sometimes highly paid.

The work of Sir William Orpen, presented by him to the

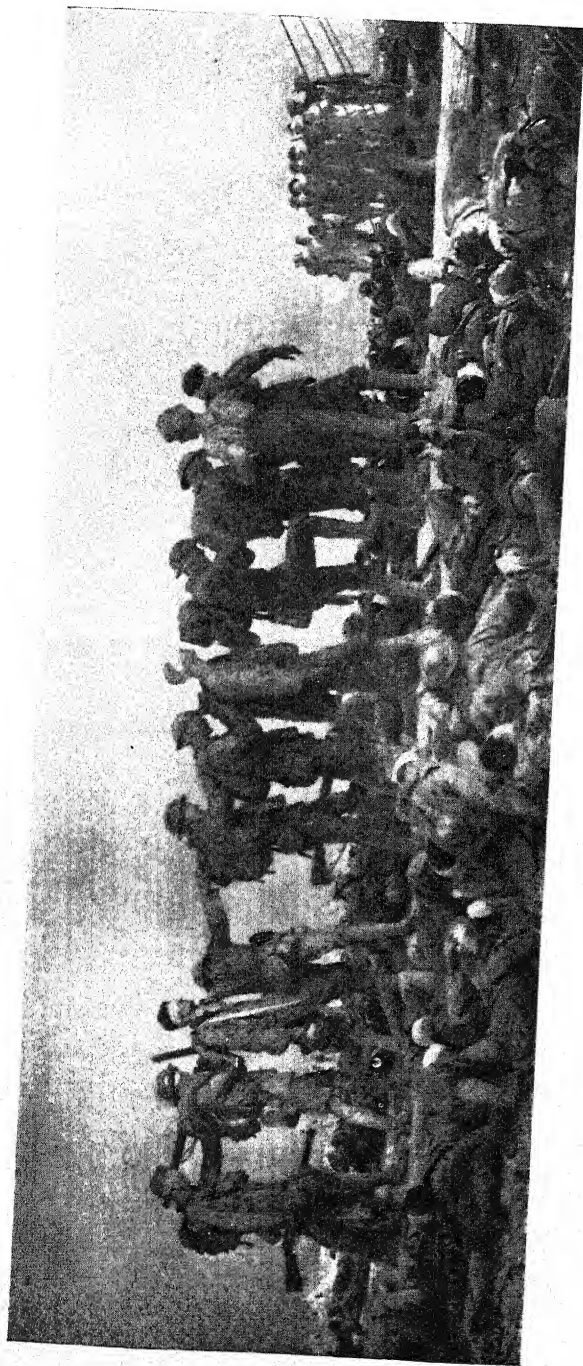
nation, is outstanding in its quantity. The portraits of celebrities, superb as they are, can be left on one side, and are here of no special interest. Of Orpen's other paintings, especially the more important, leaving technique on one side, sometimes the impression is often of a theatrical whimsicality, devoid of truth. "The mad Woman of Douai," one of whose audience is identical with the main subject in "Changing Billets," is quite unreal, as is the latter. "Bombing : night," "A German plane passing St. Denis," "Armistice night, Amiens," "The official entry of the Kaiser," have mocked truth in the effort to manufacture pictures.

This is sheer picture making. Orpen's experience of war was not of the character to permit him to indulge in such picture manufacture. When he painted the portrait of an Army Commander or a Platoon Sergeant, there was truth. When he caricatured the British soldier, he expressed only his own impish mind. Nevertheless, in that great collection, some of Orpen's pencil sketches are masterpieces, in motif, atmosphere, and realism. Few artists could have written down "A death among the wounded in the snow," "A man thinking on the Butte de Warlencourt," "A man with a cigarette," "Shell-shock."¹ Orpen was almost a soldier. He served for many months on the Western Front, painting portraits and thoroughly enjoying himself in his own way. His work is the less convincing on account of the theatrical sets.

In considering art, there is an impulse, from which it is difficult for the public to disassociate itself, to look for the work of men whose names are of national fame, and to expect that in it there shall be truth. A high responsibility was imposed, therefore, upon the famous artist.

John S. Sargent, perhaps the greatest among contemporary painters, produced one historic canvas : "Gassed." The figures are life-size, and it occupies a wall space of thirty feet by sixteen. The composition is superb, and each detail of action, equipment, pose, is carried out with extraordinary fidelity. One may learn the reason ; for the Imperial War Museum is possessed also of Sargent's pencil studies and letters relating to the composition demonstrating the artist's labour and devotion before he laid brush upon canvas. Sargent's water-colour sketches, too, of troops billeted in barns, in the streets of French towns, or only robbing an orchard, reproduce faithfully the spirit and atmosphere

¹ But compare Imperial War Museum Photograph Q 2726 with Orpen's water-colour drawing, also, in the Museum, "Poilu and Tommy."



"GASSED"

From the painting by John S. Sargent, R.A.

(NOTE.—The dressing station at Le Bac-du-Sud, on the Doullens-Arras Road, August 1918. Gassed cases arrived in parties of about six men, led by an orderly. They sat or lay down on the grass, and there were several hundred patients when the artist made his sketches. The gas used in this attack was mustard gas, and it caused temporary blindness.



*
"A DEATH AMONG THE WOUNDED IN THE SNOW"
From the painting by Sir William Orpen, R.A.

of the Western Front. In Sargent's work there is no attempt at symbolism and no desire to create effect.

When the cubists and the modernists "had a dash" they had very little to tell us. The official artists were under the Bureau of Information, which became a full-blown Ministry. The modernists have no cause for complaint, and their's has been a bitter one, that "the military tailors, the generals, the Censors, the jingo propagandists, the Royal Academy, the head masters of art schools" did not like their pictures. C. R. W. Nevinson may be a pacifist, but not of the destructive kind; and Nevinson, although a modernist, neither in motif nor in treatment, had anything in common with those who painted abstract pictures which have occupied so much space upon the walls of the Imperial War Museum. We may add to the work of Sargent, and that selected from Orpen's gallery, Nevinson's "The roads of France," "Reliefs at dawn," and "After a Push."

The drawings of Muirhead Bone are singularly distinguished and truthful pictures, as are the notable contributions of Eric Kennington.

The name of Augustus John must arouse interest. Perhaps this artist had little sympathy with the task, beyond the commission, and this accounts for the fact that his important picture, which may or may not be a satisfactory example of John's technique, is indistinguishable from one of the *Daily Mail* photographs, sold as a picture postcard.

With the exception of the work which I have noticed, we must look elsewhere for truth. Some most distinguished work has been accomplished by unofficial artists in plastic form. There is nothing approaching the actuality and dramatic composition of Jagger's "The Rampart."

Oh little mighty band that stood for England,
That with your bodies for a living shield
Guarded her slow awaking.

God may be thanked that some genius had the wit to acquire this work for the National Gallery, though, had it possessed "The Rampart," Whitehall needed no meaningless Cenotaph. C. S. Jagger, a subaltern of the 2nd Worcestershires, in my own Division, was severely wounded and awarded the Military Cross for the defence of Neuve Eglise. Witness, too, Jagger's noble monument to the Artillery, vast, dominant, powerful. A colossus in stone: some giant, grotesque, prehistoric toad poised in vomit, set round by great human figures, living, dying, dead in its service. . . . "Quo fas et gloria ducunt!"

The mind, especially that of the creative artist, must feel and experience war before the brain and hands together become so sensitive that they can fashion truth. Orpen, with a glass of port at the "Hôtel de la Paix" in Cassell, might paint the absurd "Good-by-ee," but it took the blood and sacrifice of Neuve Eglise to produce "The Rampart."

Technique does not matter. The issue at stake is whether the picture informs of truth. There are mountains of rubbish produced by professors. If you will have truth examine the work of Sargent, Jagger, Orpen, Nevinson, Muirhead, Bone, Kennington. I think there will be no controversy, also, concerning the supremacy of the technique.

War raised English poetry to a higher pedestal; some verse out of the vortex will remain for all time engraven in stone upon war memorials and shrines. The rhythm, phrase, and motif spell the passion of the hour, the yearning, even bitterness. I discount the Jingo rhyming. There is enough sublime perfection to illustrate each Warrior mood. Thus, herein, as also some pictures have been chosen, each chapter has been prefaced by a poem, the best from the literature of souls.

The posters for the furtherance of various causes associated with the War, War Loans, Recruiting, Increased Production, the Red Cross, Economy, and so forth, were wholly undistinguished. It might be imagined that a Ministry of Information, especially one directed by Northcliffe, with so sure a propaganda sense, would have brought all the forces appealing to the mind through the eye under one direction, and would have impelled them as does the Advertising Manager selling a single product or a variety of lines belonging to one House. Probably the dullness of military posters precedes the Northcliffe era, following the voluntary recruitment period, for his reign in this department was attended by unqualified success.

Recruiting posters were dull and uninspired; whereas all those issued in Germany, especially the work of Ludwig Hohlwein, were superb in composition, colour scheme, and appeal. The best British posters of the period advertised waterproof coats, "trench coats," sold by Thresher and Glenney, of the Strand, and Pope and Bradley tailoring—the nation of shopkeepers.

With such training, subject to diverse propaganda, the citizen, as soldier, went to war.

CHAPTER V

MANY INVENTIONS

NOVEMBER 1915—FEBRUARY 1916

The boys of Béthune—Practical experience—Trench Mortar Batteries and Machine-Gun Corps—Battle exercises—Topography of La Bassée and Loos—Mining companies—Steel helmets—War of experts—Raids of two kinds—success and failure.

Out of the fields I see them pass,
Youth's own battalion—
Like moonlight ghosting over grass—
To dark oblivion.

They have a wintry march to go—
Bugle and fife and drum !
With music, softer than the snow
All flurrying, they come !

They have a bivouac to make
Out on the starry heath ;
And there a long long sleep to take,
Beyond reveillé—Death !

Since Youth has vanished from our eyes,
Who, living, glad can be ?
Who will be grieving when he dies
And leaves this Calvary ?¹

IF the recollection of Ypres brings only memories of the shambles, the bare bones of masonry, the skeleton of a city, and human bodies, burnt with fire, battered by high explosive, discoloured by poisonous gasses, Béthune abides as the town of joy. Tawdry perhaps, artificial a little, yet its own self, carefree, fatalistic.

No town in all France so surrendered itself to the war mood of British soldiers, tens of thousands of them who fought the battles overlooked by Béthune's spires and towers. The warriors of Neuve Chapelle, "the Brickstacks," La Bassée, Loos, battlefields of Artois, came back to the lights, gleaming or red, of gay Béthune.

¹ From "Youth's Own," by John Galsworthy.

Later, Amiens may have set itself in bold and garish imitation, St. Pol or Cassel have dressed themselves in war-time's motley, but Béthune fashioned an immemorable pattern for the fleeting hours between billets and trench, battle and battle. Béthune found itself in harmony with ten thousand invaders, opened its arms to them, made them utterly at home. The happiness provided by Béthune was rather a peaceful rapture than feverish pleasure. The attainment of true happiness elsewhere must be fought for. To win its bliss men must endure. So, having fought and endured we gained the rare sweets of happiness in Béthune.

The streets and lights of Béthune remain tenderly vivid. Those who sipped coffee and luscious chocolate in the *pâtisseries*, and clinked tall glasses in the bar of the "Globe," were very young. Béthune still its 1914 self, seldom surprised by high explosive, gave its heart to British soldiers. And most of those who thronged the street were little more than schoolboys. Those who only knew the empty battered hulk of Béthune after years of bombardment will have missed its spirit, though they may have found its fleeting echo in Amiens.

No town on all the Western Front was ever quite like the Béthune of 1915. From the armies had faded the soldiers of tradition, and those who remained were absorbed and lost in the great expansion of "Kitchener's Army." To most of those who played in Béthune the bitterness of the Retreat was unknown, the gall of winter trenches untasted, the shock of battle untried. Here was the flower of English youth, and Scottish youth, Welsh, and Irish, too.

The New Armies were taking the field. They came in easy stages, billeted on the line of march in the pleasant villages of Artois, the fields and trees tinted with the first green freshness of spring and early summer. It was crocus time, and the weeks passed in which the daffodil, the narcissus, and the lilac scent the air. The lads who gaily tramped the roads were fresh from the hard training and new disciplines of the mushroom camps and huddled bivouacs of plain and moor. This life of light marching and of snug barns for rest was a novel holiday. Here was experience filled with delight. The fun of shopping in a foreign tongue, however trivial the purchases; of courting with a kind of "dumb crambo"; and of watching customs so alien from our own.

Division after Division, they moved up. The trench line in front of Béthune was possessed of a highly organized defence system of several lines with ample communication trenches. A

comparatively quiet sector, but not so unbusinesslike in the matter of war that its daily life ceased to be pregnant with battle, murder, and sudden death. The sector was capable, also, of a variety of battle exercises for troops as yet not inured to conditions of modern war. The front between Givenchy and Vermelles presented ample possibilities for exploiting the tactical training of the Salisbury Plains in terms of realism.

The British and German lines lay close to one another with ever present possibilities for breaking the quiet by a swift raid across "No Man's Land." On no part of the front, also, had such headway been accomplished with mining, providing opportunities for minor tactical successes, and endless exercises in the rapid fortification of a few yards gained by the advance lip of a fresh crater added to a growing honeycomb. The nearer the lines approached to one another, even so facilities for bomb throwing were enhanced. These new troops had been carefully trained in the arts of bomb throwing. Now, from the extremity of some sap, or from the edge of a newly blown crater, strong arms could hurl Mills' bombs by the dozen into the enemy trenches and mine craters, while heads dodged those of German pattern which came back.

Trench Mortar Batteries and Machine-Gun Companies, the T.M.B's and M.G.C., had been formed, and they, too, as part of the exercise in co-operation by all arms were called upon to play their part.

The Stokes Mortars with strong dugouts in the support lines—rat-ridden "Old Boots Trench" in front of Cambrin was such a resort—would appear and fire lofty salvoes from these curious pipes ; and then would return to shell-sanctuary below ground, while German shrapnel and high explosive blew the British sandbags about, and caused the Infantry sentries, on ground level, to hide their heads. And when the row had ceased the German trench-mortar men on the other side would run hastily also from deep dugouts, plant the *minenwerfer* in position and return the Stokes' greeting with "flying pigs." These hideous great missiles could be seen as they flew gently revolving through the air. When they exploded with thunderous detonation nothing could be seen but clouds of dust, and perhaps some poor wretches whose pulverized remains clung bloodily to the torn trench walls.

The M.G.C., giving effect to the long known, but newly exploited excellence of their weapons, entrenched themselves in loopholed strongholds, and from these secure vantage points, in

batteries, hailed the German breakfasts with long-range, indirect fire, over the heads of our Infantry in the front lines. These latter ducked their heads, and sent back explosive telephonic messages of protest, while M.G. commanders, who had long since forgotten even the first principles of mathematics, juggled and struggled with slide rules and protractors in an earnest endeavour to link map scale and contour lines with trajectories and lines of fire. "Machine-Gun House," behind the "Brick-stacks," an isolated building of two stories, still late in 1915 possessed of a tiled roof, was a private haunt of experimenting machine-gun officers.

And further back, hiding behind the villages of Cambrin or Quinchy, new field and heavy batteries fired salvoes, "bracketted" and "searched," with observation officers posted in the turreted strength of "the Brick-stacks" or on the tops of houses. The F.O.O's had a merry time, always sure of welcome with refreshment in an Infantry dugout, when, in reply to their experimentation the German gunners bestirred themselves, placing barrages upon the Infantry lines, until the telephone lines, if uncut, hummed with blasphemy.

But all these preparatory and perilous annoyances were very necessary to the conduct of war by a citizen army with but a few short months of training.

Experts of all kinds came up "Piccadilly," worked along "Old Boots Trench," kicked up Hell in "the Brick-stacks," practising all kinds of devilry. And having practiced they returned to Béthune.

So, also, Division after Division, Brigade after Brigade, having performed a Raid or two, in which all arms co-operated—mortars spouting bombs; artillery placing "box barrages" and "lifting"; machine-guns chattering and spitting in support; the bayonet, bludgeon, and bomb—came back to play in the villages with Béthune as the focus of the fun. And they were boys who made this pleasant French provincial town, perhaps in peace time as dull as others, into a city, peopled by tens of thousands, given to youth's pleasures, reasonably requested, simply supplied.

The long pavé road leading through Beuvry, Cambrin, and Quinchy to La Bassée, across the German lines was often "strafed." We always came back from the line with some losses. A shell would burst in a platoon as at night new troops made their first excursion to the line. Death looked them in the eyes for the first time, curiously, grotesquely, horribly. Smith and Jones who but a moment earlier had been jesting of some puerile venture

in Béthune, lay at the roadside, limp-limbed, torn and bleeding, breath coming in short stertorous gasps, eyes already glazed by the hand of death. On the morrow their mortal remains would be buried in the cemetery beside the rickety church in Cambrin, while the padre intoned the burial service and scattered the dust.

Every man performed the duty to which he had been trained. The daily casualties were carried upon stretchers down the long alley-ways to the ambulances which waited at "No. 1 Harley Street," the great house blazoned with the red cross, standing at the end of the communication trench, which "Gerry" for many weeks refused to shell. And those who died were interred with proper solemnity, with an officer and friends in attendance, in the churchyard.

It was an orderly war, conforming to the training text works of those days. How vastly different from the customs imposed by the giant grapples of the Somme, Arras, or Third Ypres.

The men, smudged out of life against a trench side, or blown to smithereens by a mortar bomb; or perhaps smothered in the ruins of a "brick-stack," or tossed fifty yards in fragments by the explosion of a mine beneath their feet, were first gathered and collected, then lamented by their shocked comrades who by a miracle of chance had escaped, and so were forgotten in the business and the frolic of war.

Sometimes a sentimental soul would shudder and drop a tear in a wine glass in Béthune, for some "mucking-in chum" who had been counted out. But as the New Armies became inured to the sudden tragedies of strife, each man became a fatalist, snatching whatever pleasure chance might throw his way, and bearing the pain of personal loss or wounds with a new-born stoicism. But these men, this youth, did not in those earlier days change their mood. They had still to learn the lesson of Loos, yet to fight the Battle of the Somme.

And the Prince of Wales, Prince of Youth, was with them. They saw him in the streets of Béthune, sometimes rubbed shoulders with this stripling, Heir to the Throne of the mightiest of all Empires, in little cafés and in tiny, homely shops. His was the gait to which youth paced, and he was with them, a boy like themselves.

Like so many other well-known towns in Flanders, the name of Béthune received the English pronunciation. As Ypres became "Wipers," and the French Amiens was renamed "Ameens," so the English tongue, grappling with a foreign language, softened the middle consonants as in "Bethel,"

rounding and prolonging the "u." Scottish troops, and the 15th Division was much in evidence, would not have it so. Thus the well-known Scottish surname spelt like that of the town, became the "Beaton" of the northern dialect.

The expansion of the Army before the Béthune days was remarkable. At Mons the British Army had numbered four Divisions : on the Aisne there were only six. Eight Divisions were engaged in the First Battle of Ypres, and now there were twenty-two. The quality of these new Divisions, the older having been reinforced from the first volunteers, was probably higher than at any other period in the military history of the race. Those Divisions were composed of the flower of British manhood ; and, it shall be remembered, that of the first thirty-three Divisions, all but five were essentially English. In reading accounts of battle, especially in the contemporary press of the period, one is inclined to form the view that Highland, Welch, and Irish soldiers were dominant in these armies. But this was not so. English soldiers, patient, well disciplined, stubborn in defence, courageous in attack, fought and won the battles on the Western Front. The Scots, Irish, and Welch, Australians, Canadians, and the glorious South African Brigade contributed their part. Nevertheless, in terms of battle tactics, and in numbers of men, the trumpetings in the Press were out of all proportion to the weight of those not English in the scales.

The countryside and landscape around Béthune was largely different from that of other sectors occupied by the British armies.

"*La Compagnie des Mines de Béthune*" had developed large coal mines, the seams of which had been opened on both sides of what became "No Man's Land," south of the La Bassée Canal. The subsoil was of white chalk, and the excavations clearly declared both our own and the German trench line systems. The mines were over sixty years old, and production had risen from four thousand tons in 1853 to well over two million tons in 1914. The villages of Beuvry, Annequin, Noeux-les-Mines, Mazingarbe and others had risen as the mines developed, while towering slag heaps appeared beside the shaft heads. The flat plains were broken and the horizon traversed by the winding gear staged above the shafts, and by twelve pitheads at the bottom of whose shafts the seams were connected, covering several square miles of workings. The slag heaps, known by the name of "fosse," numbered nine which were important, and though in days of peace the fosses had only been excrescencies of waste, in war they assumed considerable importance.

"Fosse 8," famous for the struggles which took place on its grimy sides in the Battle of Loos, lay close behind the German line. It had been trenched and burrowed for machine-gun posts, while its eminence, although kept under recurrent shell fire, was an observation point of importance for the German artillery. No fosse on the British side so closely approached the lines as did "Fosse 8." Nevertheless, we too used "Fosse 9" behind Annequin for observation purposes. From the trenches beside the La Bassée Canal, away to the south-east, could be observed the great winding wheel still crazily hanging on its steel tower above "Fosse 8."

British troops were never short of coal in the neighbourhood of Béthune; and right up till September 1915 the miners with their families continued to live in the model dwellings erected by the *Compagnie*. The machinery and equipment of the mines were of the latest mechanical perfection, and included the triumphs of Babcock and Wilcox, Green, and Westinghouse. The coking plant was considerable. The output from Fosses 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 was almost exclusively of coking coal, while that from 2, 10, and 11 were suitable for domestic use, and Fosses 1 and 11 supplied gas coal. The miners of my own Brigade, and there were many from the Welsh pits serving in the Welch Fusiliers, from those of Lanarkshire serving in the 1st and 5th Scottish Rifles, and in the 93rd Highlanders, were somewhat contemptuous of the quality of the coal extract, though from the coke dumps we were able to furnish the braziers in the line.

This question of burning coke in an open brazier in the depths of an unventilated dugout revealed a new problem, which was never solved. The poisonous fumes coming from off the coke not only induced drowsiness and very heavy sleep, but could not be endured for long. However heavy the shelling, man was obliged to seek refuge from the choking fumes, upon which in safety he cooked his food, and risk the insecurity of fresh air with its accompanying bombardment.

Over this life of mines and industrial workings Béthune presided. And to the trench system, curling itself between the slag heaps and villages, the new Divisions came. Often in the long communication trenches a working party, whitened by chalk from the surface mining of British imposition, would pass another such party begrimed with coal-dust from the pithead of the earlier trench activity. It is curious, indeed, that a Sector, historically associated with mining, should have become the centre of war's activity in similar operations. Numbers of men,

skilled miners from the English, Scottish, and Welsh pits were withdrawn from their Battalions and formed into Mining Companies, officered by those who had been works managers and foremen in the home pits. Their task was to burrow out and strut with props long subterranean galleries, cut from chalk, undermining the German trench system. Then, when the gallery was prepared, a T-shaped angle was constructed at its end and tamped with dynamite. During a favourable night, especially when it was learned that a German relief would take place, the mine was blown.

Sometimes these blows were in conjunction with Infantry action, the Raid fashionable in those days, and sometimes we merely secured the somewhat doubtful tactical advantage of being obliged to rush forward while still the débris was falling, and occupy, with a handful of men, the forward lip of the new crater.

But while so assiduously we burrowed beneath the German lines they, too, were similarly preoccupied. In the silence of the galleries, when our parties were not at work, a listener might hear the tap . . . tap . . . tap . . . of the German picks, sometimes beneath the lowest trench gallery, or to a flank, perhaps even above. When the latter was heard it was a joyful moment, for the advantage lay with ourselves, and we were in the position of being able to wreck the German galleries and blow their workers sky-high. Following each successive blow mining was largely a race, listening always, charting progress from such observation of the opposing galleries, and then getting in the first blow. Organizing a crater for defence was in itself a complete art of minor tactics.

Probably in the history of warfare there has never been any scene of operations of more absorbing interest, and in which there was so much scope for initiative and ingenuity for all arms of the service—and of all ranks of those arms—than this labyrinth of trenches, bastions, strong points, communication trenches, dugouts, sap-heads, and mine craters. The period spent in this sector was one of most valuable training.

It was a time when the antagonists had expended the full force of their power in the opening clash of war. The first round was over. After a ding-dong battle, both sides were exhausted. It was necessary for the opposing forces to take stock in their corners of the whole range of their knowledge of ringcraft. To their aid, therefore, they called in their seconds—the inventor, the chemist, the engineer, and the scientist. New engines of

war had to be experimented with, new inventions tried, new tactics evolved, in order that the deadlock of trench warfare could be overcome.

It may be recalled how the armchair critic of the Press at this time filled its columns with statement and argument intended to convince a credible public that the German armies would be starved into submission by the ring of steel around them; and how our relations and friends at home imagined, as indeed they did until the end of the War, that every man in France and Flanders, whether in the front line or at the Base, was stuck in a trench, usually with his feet in water, armed with a long bayonet, ready to repel the advancing hordes of the enemy! If, in their conception, it was possible for the enemy to advance upon us, as apparently it was, it was never clear to us why these gullible people could not appreciate the fact that it was equally possible for ourselves, by the evolution of tactical method, to advance upon them, and finally overwhelm the forces of Germany.

It came to pass, therefore, that from the sap-head and the front line, the Mining Companies which were in the process of formation, on both sides, commenced to dig. Within a few weeks they had formed under "No Man's Land," and under the front-trench system, a maze of galleries and mine shafts as intricate as the labyrinth of trenches and communications which existed on the surface.

While the miners were throwing out their galleries and preparing demolitions on a grand scale in "No Man's Land," the Infantry in the front and support lines were testing bombs, grenades, and the new automatic small arms with which they had been supplied.

Of the many varieties of these weapons and forms of destruction, the most famous and durable were the Mills Bomb, the Lewis and Vickers Machine-Guns, and the Stokes Mortar.

We like the Boche, had a holy horror of Stokes' mortars, whose flatulent ejections always brought a quick retaliation.

"You! 'Oo are you? The b . . . trench mortars! You ain't a-comin' 'ere, any'ow! Crimes—here's the Jocks luggin' the gaff up for 'em!"

"Hey! Are you the gowks that wants tae play about wi' these tin-ribbed polonies?"

"Hand 'em over, Jock!"

"Stand by—FIRE!" (Swish-swish.) "Duck, boys!"

(Crack-ss-swish!) Into the dugout! (Phut!)

"'Oo the 'ell's comin' dahn' ere? Blarsted wind up! This

ain't a Rowton 'ouse ! Tork abaht the overcrahding question ! Wot I ses is, damn them flamin' mortars ! ”

The steel helmet, without which the appearance of the Warrior is now almost unfamiliar, was not generally introduced until the late autumn of 1915. Prior to this date, the flat-peaked cap had been variously changed to render it less conspicuous. The removal of the wire which served to stretch the top, rendered the cap at once more comfortable and convenient, and less conspicuous in trenches or bobbing behind the sandbags. The conspicuous dark blue and black glengarries, with their coloured dicing, of Scottish Regiments were replaced with khaki Balmorals. Thus far camouflage was effected, but the head, so vulnerable, remained exposed, especially to shrapnel. The pattern used by British troops, resembling a deep soup plate, although in appearance less satisfying than the French, but particularly the German pattern, the latter with its scuttle neck protector, was in fact the most efficient. Known as the Hadfield helmet, it was manufactured from patent steel, and weighed $25\frac{1}{2}$ ounces, and resisted missiles up to 750 feet per second ; the French helmet $23\frac{1}{4}$ ounces ; and the German 37 ounces. But the power of resistance of the French was very low, and even that of the considerably heavier German helmet was much less than the Hadfield helmet.

In conjunction with experiments with mine and mortar, it was decided that the “ Grey Rats ” on the other side of “ No Man's Land ” must constantly be dug from their holes, and irritated by personal contact with the British soldier. A new tactical operation was therefore introduced. This was known as “ The Raid.”

On reading the official Communiqué that a successful raid had been carried out on a given sector resulting in the taking of a few prisoners, few realized what such an operation involved in the way of preparation ; the study of ground, compilation and issue of maps, siting of mortar and machine-guns ; digging of mine galleries ; cutting of wire ; placing of barrage ; bringing up of bombs, gas cylinders, medical stores, signalling apparatus ; deductions by the Intelligence branch of the General Staff from aeroplane photographs ; and not least, the rehearsal on similar ground behind the line by that body of troops selected to play their little part in the tactical operation.

The enemy on our front in May 1915, particularly opposite the “ Brick-stacks ”—Quinchy—had been most active, and had caused us a considerable number of casualties. Indeed, the “ Brick-stacks ” themselves had become a byword as a death-

trap. Not only had they been raked in their very foundations by the explosion of vast mines beneath them, but they were showered, both by day and by night, with *minenwerfer* bombs, mortars, "flying pigs," and other metallic gifts of a generous enemy. Six brick-stacks were in our lines; four in those of the enemy; and between them a narrow strip of "No Man's Land," not more than forty yards wide. Owing to the fact that the brick-stacks in our lines were built on a high elevation in full enemy view, and the base of those in the German lines protected from our observation by a similar rise in the ground, it was an impossible task to commence mining operations from our side, while it was an easy matter for the Germans to sink a shaft. They were not slow to utilize this tactical advantage. On three separate occasions in January the brick-stacks and the trench systems surrounding them had been shaken and partially destroyed by a mighty upheaval of bricks and clods of earth, some of which must have weighed nearly a ton.

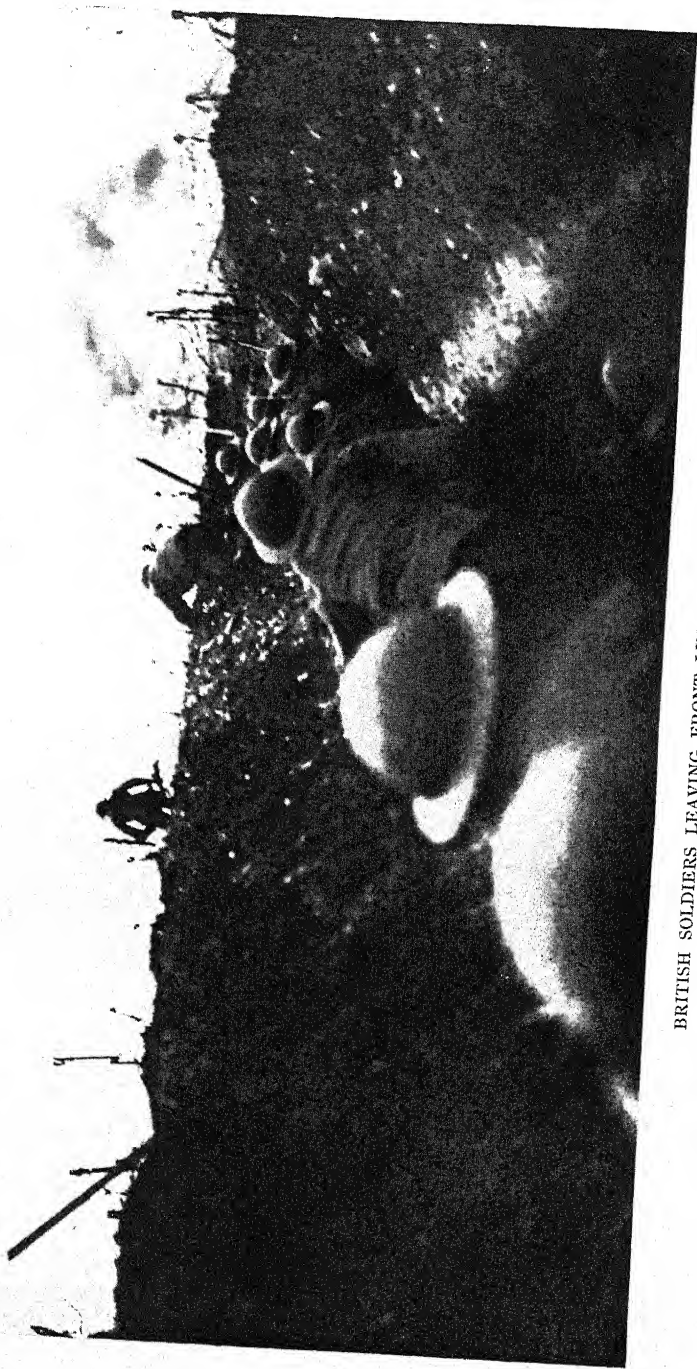
It was the misfortune of the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders to garrison these strong points in our line on each of these three occasions. They had suffered heavily, and their anger was deeply aroused. It was discovered, however, that if one of our strong points on the south side of the La Bassée road was projected a few yards further into the enemy's lines, that from this point excellent observation could be obtained, in enfilade, of the German operations behind their brick-stacks. A small mine was therefore blown opposite this point. From the chalk surrounding our lip of the crater an admirable view could then be obtained of the Boche miners entering and leaving their mine shafts behind a brick-stack in their lines. A periscope and telephone were fixed up here in connection with two machine-guns in the hands of the Machine-Gun Corps firing from the support line, and by this method we were frequently successful in being able to interfere with the progress of the enemy's mining operations.

This was not enough. The blood of the Highlanders was up. Nothing would satisfy them but a raid, involving the bomb, the bayonet, the bludgeon, in fine, warfare at close grips. They were not disappointed. A raid was carried out at dead of night against the enemy garrison holding the "New Year Crater," the blowing of which had destroyed so many of the Highlanders, and upon the trench system connecting the crater with the German lines. With blackened hands, legs, and faces, bomb and bludgeon in hand, and bayonet in support, a company of

Highlanders was concentrated for the assault behind the western lip of the crater. To create a diversion in the German lines, a large mine was sprung some six hundred yards further south. Five minutes later, "heavies" and field-guns, trench mortars and machine-guns opened an intense bombardment upon the area surrounding that intended to be raided, forming what was technically known as a "box barrage," isolating, unknown to themselves, the enemy garrison from any possibility of support. Under cover of the deafening roar of the guns, the Highlanders leaped to the assault. Here and there an enemy machine-gun opened its stuttering fire, but this was undirected. The garrison was overwhelmed. The *arme blanche* in the hands of proved experts did its execution quickly and thoroughly. The garrison was annihilated, being either killed or captured to a man.

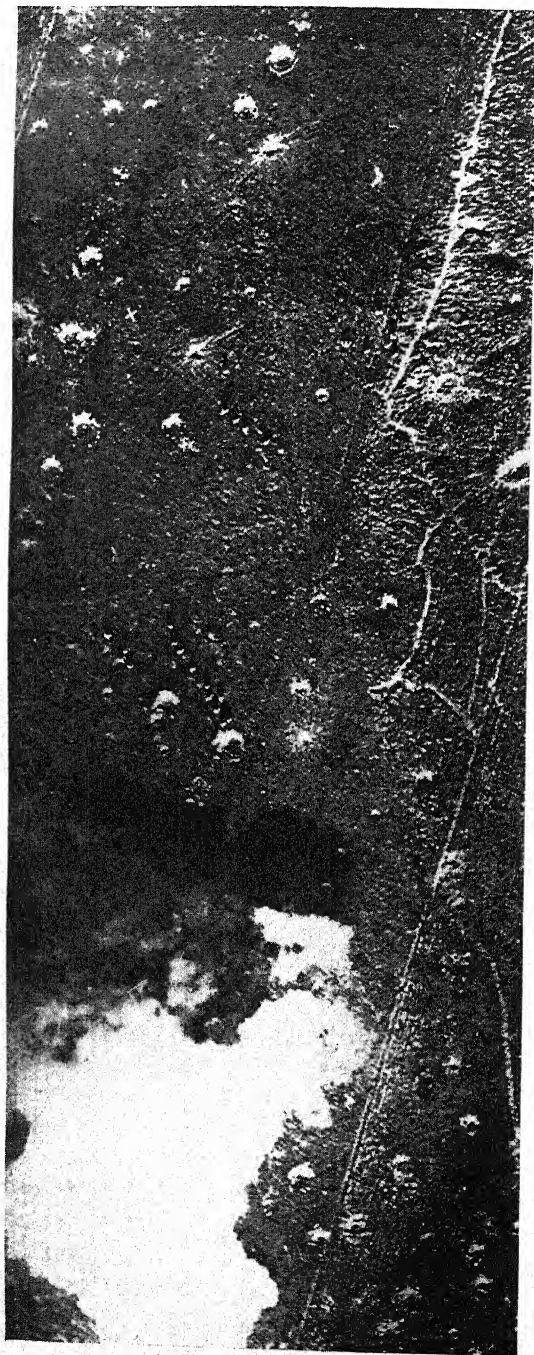
Technically, there were two types of raid: first, the "raid and stay"; secondly, the "raid and away," or the "smack and back." The raid referred to was of the first type, for the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders now occupied both lips of the crater, having taken the place of the former enemy garrison. Tactically this little operation was of great importance, for, owing to our proximity to the German front line, it was now necessary for the enemy to reconsider the whole of his mining activity opposite this front, due to the danger for himself of causing an explosion so close to his own lines. This danger rested upon a technicality—soil strata and substrata, tamping of charges, and resistance to explosive force.

A most notable raid was carried out by the Glasgow Highlanders opposite Cambrin on the 27th June, 1916. It was a raid on a grand scale. "Smack and back." Sir Douglas Haig reported upon it in his Communiqué as the most successful raid which up to that date had taken place. Nothing was overlooked. No eventuality not anticipated. Under cover of a "creeping barrage," which during the raid was formed into a "box barrage," the Highlanders entered into a section of the German front line and communication trenches. This section included two mine-shaft heads. Not only did they "make hay" of the defence works themselves, and bomb the dugouts, but, assisted by a small party of Royal Engineers, they entered the enemy's mine galleries, destroying them by camoufllets, and captured sixty-one prisoners and two machine-guns, while they themselves only suffered three casualties, all of which were light. So delighted were the Jocks with their success that in several instances "smack and back" became "back and smack" again!



BRITISH SOLDIERS LEAVING FRONT LINE FOR A DAYLIGHT RAID

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BRITISH SOLDIERS ATTACKING ACROSS "NO MAN'S LAND" BEHIND A SMOKE SCREEN
Sheet 53.B. U 21 c. Showing Hindenburg Line north-west of Bullecourt, 6th April, 1917.

One Highlander, at least, made three journeys backwards and forwards across "No Man's Land" securing prisoners and booty.

But all raids were not successful.

Rain, a steady downpour, had been our lot for many days. We had followed the same routine, week in, week out, five days in filthy, foetid, squelching mud holes—so quickly do good trenches degenerate—followed by five days in damp blankets, wet straw, and dripping, rat-ridden barns. Our reliefs had followed the same routine.

Five days of complete, unutterable boredom, broken only by a casualty, a shell which pitched between the oozing clay walls, tearing a lonely sentry to ribbons, or a sniper's bullet dealing a death blow to the bobbing head which too unwarily displayed itself above the parapet; boredom broken by the visit of a general, or some expert bearing a new periscope contrivance with which perhaps we might better view the weary landscape of shattered tree stumps, waterpools, sodden sandbags, empty tins, and rusted wire; interrupted only by the arrival of newspapers which, when opened, only told us that "upon the Western Front there is nothing to report"; and broken by the evening issue of rum, which solemn rite, once eagerly awaited, had now become an irritating duty. Tempers were soured, and friendships strained, men prayed and blasphemed for something to happen to break that monotony.

And then five days of more boredom, cleaning the mud and rust from clothes and equipment, wandering aimlessly over the rough cobbled streets of the half-deserted Flemish village of Beuvry, in which the few remaining peasant inhabitants regarded British troops with suspicion, or as a pest which had descended upon their crops and cattle. How far away seemed Béthune then! Boredom broken only by the wheezing of a gramophone, churning out the few stale tunes which had been repeated to distraction; or broken by the annoyance of having to deal out minor punishment to those who had sought to bury boredom in the abdominal torture of drink, fostered on the red acid which passed for wine in a mean estaminet. Men would march over the pavé roads with agony in their feet and anger in their minds, through pouring rain, great lorries and swift staff cars flinging black and yellow mud upon them as they passed, to be deloused and washed at Annequin, and then return wet to the skin and stained with fresh mud to the boredom of the hovels.

Upon a day prior to another tour of duty in the line, Gillespie, Clarke, and Grant, seated in the Pâtisserie in Béthune, before

this haven of rest and excitement had become wholly anglicised and fashionable, were engaged in hot dispute.

"Anyhow, thank God, my Company hasn't got to do the job," said Captain Gillespie, commanding "A" Company. "It's nothing but murder. What the Hell's the good of blowing up a brick-stack? The bricks won't stick in the sky. They'll come down again just about where they went up, and that won't alter the landscape much. It'll make a rotten mess of the trenches which we've spent months in putting into some kind of order; and the Boche won't care a damn. We'll all have to stand to during the show anyhow. We'll be holding 'Old Boots Trench.' They've got it registered to an inch, and the dugouts won't keep out a pip squeak. And they'll strafe the place to Hell."

"Oh, shut up," said Clarke hotly. "You're a blasted wet blanket, Gillie. Always pouring cold water about the place, as if there wasn't enough coming down from the sky. Haven't you been cursing there's nothing to do? Now they've decided to blow the mine under Brick-stack 'K,' and send us over to cop a few Boches you say its sheer murder!"

"Well, so it is," shouted Gillespie. "You're too full of fire and patriotism. Besides it's a novelty for you. I've had some."

"My dear fellow," intervened Grant quietly, "your experience was quite different. I don't want to lecture. Our stunt at Plugstreet was suicide, I admit, though it may have served a purpose. You've got no experience of mines, neither have I. At least the mine introduces an element of surprise. My Company's in support and I'm damned glad. I think there'll be some fun. I only wish we could have had a chance to rehearse the business on dummy trenches or with tapes."

"Hark at him," jeered Gillespie. "Grant, why do you always pose as a budding Field-Marshal? You may have got a louse in your shirt, but the days of batons and knapsacks are ancient history. What the Hell's the good of rehearsing anything? It never comes off according to plan: and the 'unknown factor,' or whatever you call it in your Staff College jargon, always upsets the show. You ought to have joined the Navy, Grant, instead of coming to Sandhurst. Why! you might have sent a submarine up the trenches by now and torpedoed the Boche in his dugouts!"

"A very bright idea, coming from you, Gillie. But unless the jolly old 'unknown factor' disturbs the operation, it should be very successful, and quite amusing. Certainly it will break the

monotony and stop the rot which is setting in . . . not least in the mind of the commander of 'A' Company."

These three young men had joined their regiment from Sandhurst within a year or two of one another and were close friends. Grant rose and put his hands affectionately on Gillespie's shoulders. "Come on, old boy, let's go over to the Globe and have a drink. There's a Show on in the town, too. Corps has sent up some music-hall turns, and it'll be a change. Let's have a drink and then go and kick up a row. We don't want to have a dog fight here. My God, old boy, I believe we all spend more time and thought scrapping with each other and men, than we do in putting it across the Boche. As for the politicians and the Generals. My God!"

"Too true," laughed Gillespie.

They went across to the brilliantly illuminated Globe, and then huddled together in the damp warmth of a disused beet-sugar refinery, now an improvised theatre, were charmed and transported by band, ragtime, medley, and melody. And they who held the line of the brick-stacks and "Old Boots Trench" formed the audience of a sublime orchestra, whose crescendo of shrieking shell and thunder of gun intermittently thrilled and appalled; and whose pianissimo of distant cry, coming over the sky-line at dawn, lulled them to fitful slumber.

The following night the Battalion moved out of billets and went into the line. Gillespie's company in reserve in Cambrin, Grant's in support in "Old Boots Trench," Clarke's in the front line on the right of the "Brick-stacks," and "D" Company disposed among the ruins of Cuinchy on the La Bassée Canal bank and amid the "Brick-stacks" themselves. The relief was carried out quietly. The Boche, as usual, knew all about it. The German guns "bracketted" the road between "the chemist's shop" with the green shutters and "No. 1 Harley Street," the dressing station, which the enemy never shelled.

It is rather odd now to reflect how the enemy so closely "bracketted" the practice of medicine with that of the dispensary. But it was so, and strange superstitions grew up around that shop, which when every other building was demolished yet remained, as did the first two-storied solid square house in Harley Street.

The Battalion moved up the road by platoons at fifty yards interval. Gillespie, the pessimist, while disposing his men in the cellars at Cambrin, was killed by a shell beside the church; and his body buried the same evening in the churchyard in

which already rested many of his comrades, and which, with each relief, increased the number of its simple wooden crosses.

Two men killed and five wounded, although the dead included a company commander, was small toll to pay in those days for entry to the line.

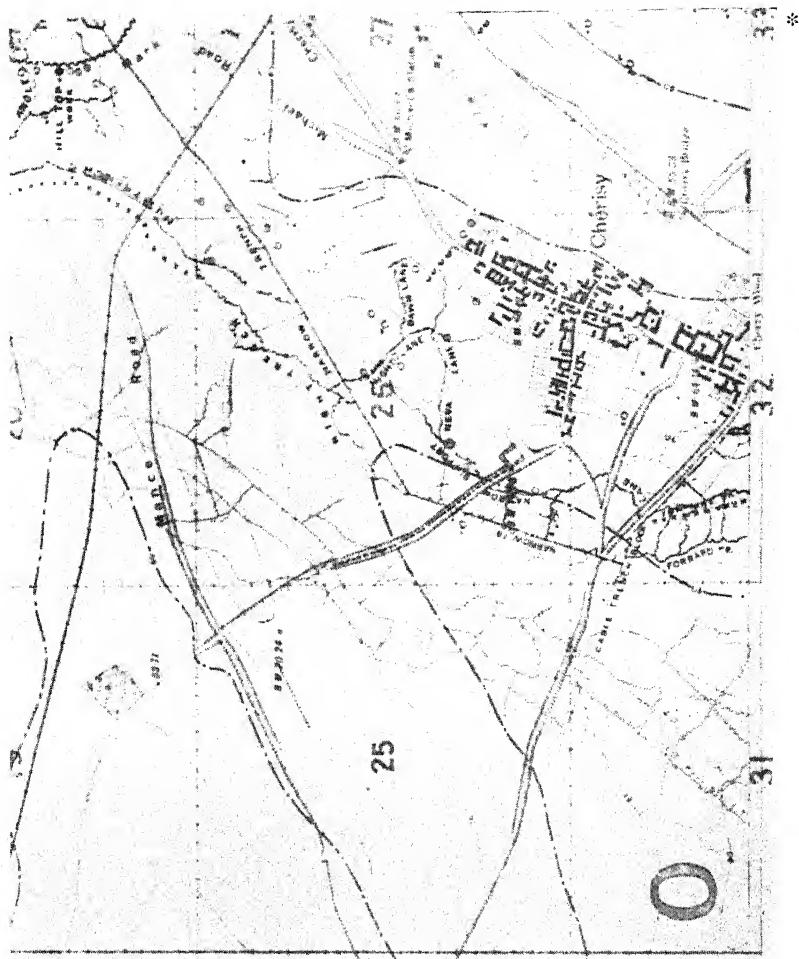
But the event provided just the necessary item of news with which to pad a censored weekly letter, laboriously written, as follows: "My dear wife i hope this finds you in the pink as it leaves me the same at present i got your letter alright and the fags poor Peter McIntosh got it in the neck last week you mind him at Mossbank when we was lodging at Shettlestone we had a concert in — quite a laugh. My love and kisses to Mary and little Andy. Your devoted husband. P.S. i have just heard Captain Gillespie has been killed he commanded my platoon at —."

On the following day preparations were made to blow the mine and for the raid itself. The time was planned for ten o'clock in the evening when it was thought the enemy would be carrying out an internal relief. Ration parties would be busy on the roads and in the communication trenches.

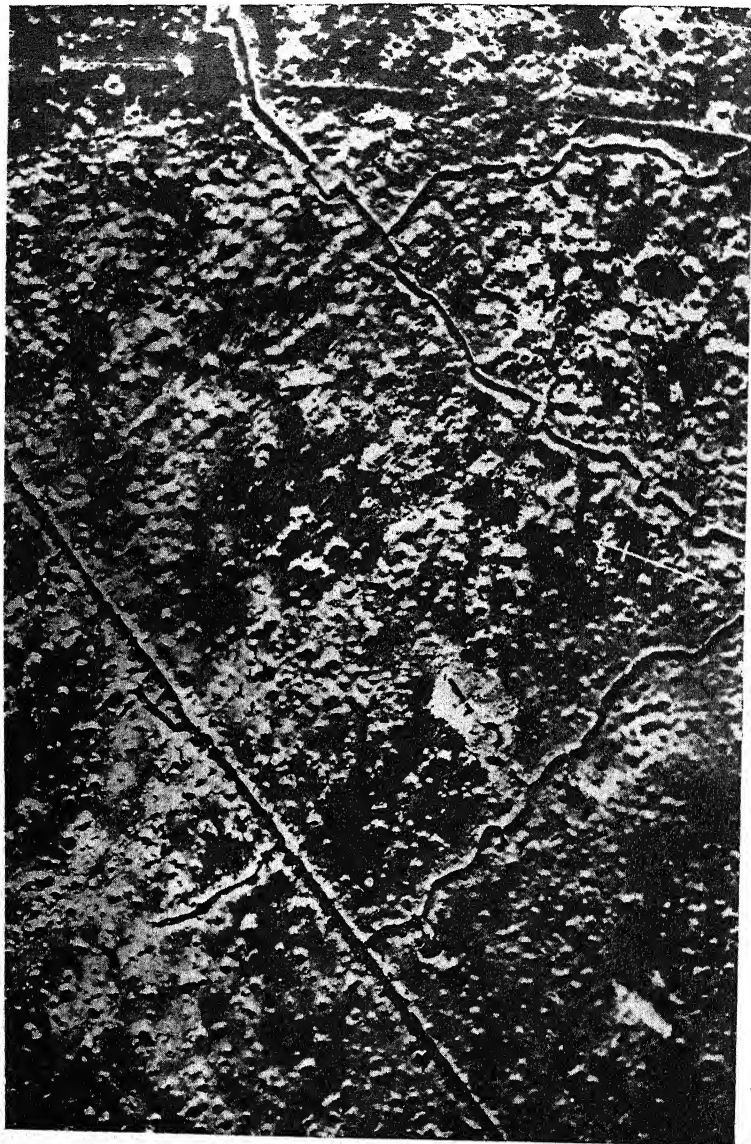
As soon as darkness fell Clarke's company was moved back from the forward lines into "Old Boots Trench," from which position it was to go forward after the blowing of the mine, across the British trenches, and into the German lines some forty yards farther on. Two platoons of Grant's Company were to remain, in support, in case of counter-attack, well forward of "Old Boots Trench," but deep down in dugouts sufficiently strong to withstand the fall of débris. It was for this purpose that Clarke's Company had been withdrawn. A monstrous mine was to be exploded, and the falling earth—Heaven knows how many tons of it—would imperil the lives of the raider if the latter were concentrated too near to the front line. The Company was to follow across the open ground three minutes after the explosion and complete the destruction of the enemy garrison.

Clarke met Grant in "Old Boots Trench." "Bad luck about Gillespie," said Clarke. "I'll have to write to his sister. . . . Nasty job, I know her pretty well."

"Yes," said Grant thoughtfully. "We can't afford to lose company commanders. I hope you'll be able to show her the M.C. as the result of to-night's work," he added cheerfully. "That'll buck her up no end if . . . well, you know what I mean." They both laughed. "Good luck, old man. We'll be waiting here to field the prisoners as you slog 'em over."



ILLUSTRATING RAIDS. PART OF MAP
 Sheet 51B. S.W. 2, showing British and German front lines west of Chérisy, 30th August, 1917
 Compare with Air Photograph of same ground overlaid.



↑
NARROW
TRENCH

↓
NIGHT
TRENCH

NIGHT LANE

AIR PHOTOGRAPH

Sheet 51B, O. 26 c. Showing troops in and out of trenches east of Ch'risu, 13th September, 1917. Shadows of troops of soldiers in "No Man's Land" and tops of steel helmets can be seen.

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The night was pitch-black, the rain pattering down.

It was five minutes to ten. The raiding party crouched in the trench awaiting the signal to go over. An intense silence prevailed, broken only occasionally by the sharp crack of a rifle far away to a flank towards the "Hohenzollern Redoubt," or by a soft hiss and thud as a spent bullet tumbled over and over to bury itself in the rain-sodden ground.

Suddenly, on the stroke of ten, there was a bright flash followed by an immense roar of sound. The mine had gone up. Vast hods of earth and clay, tons of debris, bricks, and timber, began, and for nearly three minutes continued, to fall over a wide area. Captain Clarke blew his whistle. It was Zero hour—three minutes past ten. "A" Company rose above the parapet and began to go forward across the open ground, while the guns from their emplacements in Cambrin and at Annequin placed a strong "box barrage" upon the German front and support lines, the forward side of which, after two minutes, was raised to allow the raiding party to carry out its task. But the effect of the mine, owing to the fact that unlocated galleries of an enemy counter-shaft had been dug in an earth stratum above the position of the charge, thereby lessening the pressure, was far greater and more widespread than the miners had anticipated. The wreckage was complete.

So tremendous and widespread had been the effect of the blow that even the British communication trenches, support and front lines were filled with the excavations from the crater, with the result that the whole terrain for some forty yards forward of "Old Boots Trench," from which the raiding party had issued, resembled "No Man's Land." Captain Clarke stumbled forward through the darkness, over mountains of earth, calling his men together. The mine had aroused a hornet's nest and the enemy guns began to speak, then a hail of shrapnel fell upon the storming party.

Clarke pressed on. He could see nothing. Then, by the frail light of a rocket to a flank, a little forward across the tangled, grotesque landscape he detected the yawning mouths of dugouts, in the depths of which he could see lights. He called to his men, who rallied through the din and blackness to his voice. They could hear the murmur of voices. These were the German dugouts and fit sport for bombs. Quickly Clarke organized his party and attacked the dugouts. The fearfulness and hesitation provoked by the mad turmoil in the darkness as they groped and stumbled forward, were swept aside as the men leaped with the

excitement of action. They hurled bombs and discharged rifles down the stairways, then followed hard upon the shock of the assault to mop up the prisoners, who would be found, cowering against the walls, with hands uplifted crying "Kamerad, Kamerad!" Discharging his revolver as he sprang and slid over the slippery steps, down which the rain-water was bucketing, Clarke plunged into the depths of the dugout reeking with explosives. He heard pitiful, plaintive cries, felt the hot breath of a man behind him. Someone struck a match. It flared up and lighted the twelve square feet enclosed by clay walls, and covered with humanity. Clarke saw no enemy, but the torn and bleeding bodies of men of his own battalion, whom he knew to be garrisoning the forward dugouts in support.

"My God," sobbed Clarke. "My God!" Within the rain pools turned to blood, without the leaderless crept back. Clarke pitched forward into the arms of his sergeant-major; his brain numbed, unconscious. Many minutes later he heard a rough voice speaking. "An error of judgment, sir. Ye canna help it. 'Twas a brave thing to try, sir. An error of judgment." Clarke looked up at him and rose mechanically.

"That's right, sergeant-major. I've made a damned mess of it, but I don't think many of the lads got through the barrage. What the Hell's the use of it?" he asked savagely. "The Company's gone west." He murmured to himself. "Perhaps Gillie was right . . . poor old Gillie."

And the Battalion went back to Béthune.

"Are we downhearted? No!" Infectious, very.

CHAPTER VI
THE THREE GRACES
MARCH-JUNE 1916

An army at home—The Pâtisserie, the Globe, and the Red Lamp—
Morality—A battlefield—"Spit and polish"—In the line—War
songs—His Majesty—Scrounging.

BACK from the line one night in June,
I gave a dinner at Béthune—
Seven courses, the most gorgeous meal
Money could buy or batman steal.
Five hungry lads welcomed the fish
With shouts that nearly cracked the dish ;
Asparagus came with tender tops,
Strawberries in cream, and mutton chops.
Said Jenkins, as my hand he shook,
"They'll put this in the history book."
We bawled Church anthems *in choro*
Of Bethlehem and Hermon snow,
With drinking songs, a mighty sound
To help the good red Pommard round.
Stories and laughter interspersed,
We drowned a long La Bassée thirst—
Trenches in June make throats damned dry.¹

THERE were three *rendez-vous* in Béthune which were especially patronized. The Pâtisserie, the Globe, and the Red Lamp. *Rendez-vous*, military generic term for meeting-place. Of these *rendez-vous*, the first two were variously favoured ; but since these establishments were used alone by Commissioned Officers, and the entertainment provided in them was wholly virtuous, even they were favoured equally according to the mood of the hour. The Prince patronized both, and, if for no other consequence, so did we others. I always regretted that as the months passed by the Pâtisserie slowly garbed itself with the air and atmosphere of the "tea-shop," and for me it lost its charms.

In the earlier days when first we came to Béthune, late on

¹ From "Corporal Stare," by Robert Graves.

Sunday morning following the hour of church, the Pâtisserie was filled with the quality of Béthune sipping coffee and sampling delicacies. We rubbed shoulders with them, choosing pastries and sweetmeats for immediate consumption, or to take back to the mess. And then we were part of France. In the back parlour of the shop were tables, much sought after, at which men could dally over steaming chocolate, and in a pretence of disputing the modest charge, flirt with the young ladies who ministered to their needs. The Pâtisserie had no competitors, though there were other shops which dispensed teas and cakes. No maidens of Béthune were ever so beautiful as those of the Pâtisserie, and no tea, no coffee, no chocolate could be brewed with so rare a flavour as that prepared by their hands. The Pâtisserie remained unique. Veritably it was the Rumpelmayer of the Western Front, and its patronage was of the same character as that of the famous pastrycook in St. James.

The Globe possessed a speciality. Champagne. "Bubbly" of the best. Not the sweetly-flavoured vintages customary to France, but those reserved especially for England; dry, crisp, sparkling gold. And it was cheap, miraculously cheap. For us in earlier years champagne had been reserved for a glass or two at Christmas; or maybe surreptitiously filched from the tables of the elders at a children's party. But at the Globe this sparkling nectar almost ran like water, discharged from bottles from some fathomless cellar. Man could always find a friend in Béthune, for, standing in the street, the Warrior from the line could look across the table-tops, down the crowded length of the bar, twice that of a cricket pitch, and search the laughing faces hovering above the glasses. At the Globe were manufactured far more stories than ever came out of the Chelsea Arts Club or the Stock Exchange. And I believe that birth was first here given to much of that classic ribaldry attached to the names of famous generals.

"Begone dull care!" The Globe, a half-bottle of champagne, and the "strafes" of a commanding officer or the enemy had burst with the bubbles; and all the weariness and disappointments of trench warfare and raids were submerged in the glitter of dancing eyes and scintillating wine.

But the Globe and the Pâtisserie were unofficial. Their success relied upon the private enterprise of both proprietor and customers. Not so Béthune's third outstanding attraction—The Red Lamp. Such patronage as this establishment secured, and it was considerable, was largely that of curiosity. Indeed, one may wonder if the Red Lamp was a necessary contribution by



"THOU SHALT NOT STEAL."
From the painting by John S. Sargent, R.A.



A

"WORCESTER TRENCH"
High Wood, Somme, 1916: All objectives taken.

officialdom to the amenities of Béthune. I cannot imagine that the long queues which each evening paraded, waiting long in rain and cold, were impelled to the tawdry entertainment of this *maison meublée* by the pangs of sexual hermitage. Ardour could usually be well and safely satisfied where and when opportunity offered an occasion. The medical pundits, who set up and ordained the house, seem to have paid little heed to the psychological attitude of young men to such matters.

No doubt there were hundreds among them accustomed to "walking out" and to "square pushing," but to the men of Britain, especially these lads suddenly armed and clothed as men, it seems uncommon folly to have offered a habit so alien to their own customs as the *maison libre*. The invitation of the Red Lamp was to their curiosity in the hours of freedom. The waiting queues proved that much. They waited, sometimes patiently for more than an hour, quietly jesting a little or engaged in commonplace discussion, marshalled by a military policeman. When the time came for entry each paid his money, a few francs, and entered the garish salon and the bedchambers of the place. Once inside, they went through the routine required much in the same manner as trained men perform rifle exercises, were a little sympathetic with the hard-faced, brazen wenches within, and then, after the licensed moments, returned somewhat ashamed of the performance.

Word was passed on to pals, from regiment to regiment, Division to Division, a kind of Intelligence service. Relays of the curious passed through the door beneath the Red Lamp. I doubt if many returned to revisit the scene of so much labour. Neither growing lads, scarcely out of their "teens," nor Englishmen unaccustomed to a feast prepared in the manner of the eating-house, required such relief or so unsavoury a presentation. If men sought romance they found it. And its relish consisted in the spice of adventure. The Red Lamp provided neither the dish nor the sauce. Psychologically it failed: and I doubt if it prevented a casualty from disease.

It is ridiculous to suppose that the abstinence of Adam from his Eve due to the semi-monastic seminary of a dugout and the cloisters of the front and support lines, could be compensated either by the routine of reliefs or by that of the Red Lamp. Man is not a donkey to be led forward by dangling a carrot in front of his nose.

Men were marvellously faithful to a wife or a sweetheart at home. They were incredibly loyal to one another. No paradox

in that, no camouflage. The simple naked truth. Men cannot live even closer to each other than man and wife, week in week out, by day, by night, and hour by hour without sharing the closest confidence. Nor will they break faith. There will be no breach. Nor was there. From this sprang comradeship and *esprit de corps*. If Smith visited the Red Lamp, Robinson knew it, and forgot. If Jones made love to the wench in the estaminet at the cross-roads, Smith may have remembered the Map Reference —, but conveniently overlooked the charms of the lady and turned a blind eye upon his pal's flirtations. Smith, Jones, and Robinson came from the same village. And Smith and Robinson were "mucking-in chums," sharing the same blanket. Robinson forgave Smith. The village has remained ignorant of any indiscretion. Such men were found in a gathering army tens of thousands of men, cohorts of them, produced from the rare individuality of English national life, and from the military training presses.

If it is yet imagined that these men were guilty of sin against the moral code, expended their virtue in debauchery, then have a look round any city, provincial town or village throughout the length and breadth of the British Isles. As is man's behaviour, so it was in Flanders. Mostly good, some weak vessels, a few bad. Every police court knows its maintenance orders, every village its indiscretions. Human nature would be different otherwise.

In the early days of the British invasion of France, too, the inhabitants still welcomed the novelty. Farmers and householders may have been resentful of the intrusion, but maidens and some wives whose young men, conscripts, had been summoned south, many already who had died *pour la patrie*, were in a mood to show more than hospitality to the invading legions of Britain's youth. History demonstrates that in war the birth-rate always rises. Objectively, this fact has no evil import for the race. On the contrary, for example, publicly and almost officially, an increase in the population of the *Pas de Calais* was welcomed by France. At this distance we can afford to smile, even as we laughed then, when we recall an illustration.

Indian troops were billeted in Merville and in the vicinity before the battle of Neuve Chapelle. Births within the year of their occupation were the subject of much speculation and gossip. I remember my own medical officer being summoned to attend an accouchement in a village some months earlier occupied by Pathans. The villagers hung around the house in eager specu-

lation as to whether the child would be white or coloured. The lady was a war widow already since 1914. No one suggested that she had sinned. Rather was this fresh venture a patriotic endeavour. My curious soldiery caught the spirit of the thing, and a sergeant made a street-corner book with even odds on the baby being "spot or plain." In this case "plain" won.

But the story of the lady, wife of an estaminet-keeper near Merville, who gave birth to twins, one white, one coloured, will remain a classic. A new sign was hung outside the "Coq d'Or," or whatever may have been the erstwhile name of the inn, renamed "Black and White." A fresh stock of whiskey of that brand was laid in. A notice invited visitors to view the twins at an additional charge of fifty centimes. Great days for the estaminet.

But the fact that such stories became notorious proves their rarity. The warriors, Smith and Jones, were too busily engaged with war for such trifles.

So much has been written to suggest that men were eternally preoccupied with lustful thoughts, slaking the thirst of passions with seduction, even rape, in the villages of Picardy and Flanders, that the slander cannot be dismissed with but a stern denial. All the analysis of psychological understanding is against the debauch thesis.

The armies were divided more or less between two distinct occupations. The fighters, generally the Divisional unit, and the Staffs with ancillary services at the Bases. The latter, of course, were in continuous contact with the civilian element, with opportunities for gratification.

The birth-rate statistics in the centres of occupation suggest something unusual. Were this not so, the history of mankind would be differently written. The truth, however, calls for more remark in those areas occupied by French and German troops.

But the charge especially has been made against the fighting man, as if the training and occupation of the Warrior was some kind of encouragement to animal lust. Such slander can only be attributed to the first armies. These swarmed in towns and villages yet occupied by civilians. Those who followed after spent their ease from the battle line in the devastated areas, from which the inhabitants had fled. Lust for them, if they had sought it, was a geographical impossibility. The charge falls, therefore, mainly upon the flower of the British youth who fought the Battle of the Somme, and upon the "Old Contemptibles."

No record of Béthune can be complete without the tale of its

destruction. The hornet-like tactics of the British, a nest and comb spreading east from Béthune, became a growing irritation to the Germans. The British assault upon the Hohenzollern Redoubt completed the exasperation. British pleasures must end. A stream of shells smote the fun city.

For those great numbers for whom, after Loos, Béthune became a home from homes war curiosity could be satisfied. They were trained in its weapons and devices within the trench system. But parties of officers and N.C.O's were conducted for tours around the Loos Salient that they might realize what a battlefield was like. There was the old German front line of 1915, its dead still keeping their vigil. And there was a ghastly shambles, from which all British traces had been removed, with booted limbs, skulls to which still clung wisps of hair, and skeletons partly obscured with rotting clothing. There were rifles and bayonets, ammunition boxes, mildewed leathern equipment, gas masks in convenient little canisters made of tin, and all kinds of souvenirs.

It was very heartening to take a trip across this battlefield, showing so clearly the disaster to the German arms ; and it was calculated to give an added inspiration to those for whom it was planned that so soon they would be themselves engaged north of the Somme. I confess that I was insatiably curious, and often toured those trenches, probing into dugouts and poking about for curiosities. I could sit quietly in the sun while "whizzbangs" and "flying pigs" expended themselves a mile farther on, examining the waste of literature and letters which still remained to be collected by those who published *Comic Cuts*.

And all round the support line at La Bassée was a labyrinth of trenches, in which in earlier days had fought the French and Germans and early British soldiers. Bits of Frenchmen, and hands and feet of Germans, stuck grotesquely out of the parapets and tumbling trench sides. There was a chaos of tins and rusty rifles of so many patterns. With these last the French had gone out to war. And from the rat-chewed trousers covering a bleak pelvis bone I could judge how suddenly the French reserves were called to war. These trousers were red, and long blue overcoats, like dressing-gowns, hung beside the collapsing dugouts, sometimes crowned with a *képi*. It was in these festering ditches that the myriads of rats which swarmed our neat trenches were billeted, and held their war councils.

In contrast to these hideous alley-ways, somewhere in whose recesses minds still delicate made latrines, the more "posh" of

which were labelled "Officers only," our own lines were as clean as a new pin. They had to be. In addition to the Loos excursions, the effort of the Staff was directed towards keeping on its high pedestal the customs of the parade ground. There were no more stone edgings of whitewash. No longer was the grass fringe before the officers' mess defended by a rope against the soldier's trespassing cloutish foot. The oiling of tin hats to make them shiny had ceased, though many had been covered laboriously with stretched sandbags to make them even more conspicuous to an observing aeroplane. Rifles and machine-guns in these trenches were polished as never before. Baby faces with scarcely a hair were shaved eternally. Everything had its place. Spaced along the front and support trenches were gas gongs, inverted brass shell cases, polished every day. Bomb boxes were built with pyramidal precision, flanked on either side with tins of lime and with veromal sprayers. And everything was labelled large. Each trench received its name and notice board. When a new alley-way had been prepared there was as much cogitation over the christening of the child as before a baptism in any historic family. But in the matter of immersion it was left to the enemy to decide. Invariably these new babies were baptized before the second day, as is customary with children whose life is expected to be short.

Not only were the trenches named and labelled like the streets of any town, but nearly all the Warrior's actions were prescribed by great notice boards which stared him in the face. "Do not loiter here—Beware Decoville track—Keep your head down past this point—Beware overhead wire—Put wastepaper in this receptacle—Company Headquarters—Gas alarm. Continue beating until all men have stood to."

The Vérey light pistols with shiny brass barrels were set in recesses in the parapet. The rockets provided poor pyrotechnics. Sometimes half a dozen of these spluttering things, following deafening reports, would be sent up before one gleamed and fizzled in the sky. Then the Germans would fire one "made in Germany," and it would glow like an arc lamp in Heaven. Even to mock us they would strike matches and throw them over the parapet, while with a hand pressed over the near ear to deaden the report we fumbled with pistols. But when a Staff Officer visited the lines these bright pistols caught his eye and compliments. And if due warning had been given of the approach of the mighty, wire receptacles, cunningly devised, were placed in the trench way with the appropriate labels, "Rubbish," and

quickly filled. And sandbags, hung on pegs, labelled for waste-paper, were quickly stuffed that they might be evidence of our zeal.

The wags, of course, made merry with these messages, and improved the shining hour. Pictures of voluptuous ladies cut from *La vie Parisienne* were posted at the junction of trenches to advertise certain aspects of the town of Béthune. And at the entrance of one mine shaft there had been written in blurred purple :

Don't go down the mine, daddy,
If you do, 'twill be for you,
Field Punishment number two.

Rotten doggerel, but a suitable warning. One may wonder, in this connection, if the Army Stationery Office, which as printers, publishers, binders, and what not was called into being, ever made statistics of the number of indelible pencils issued to troops during the campaign. Unless in respect of forward area communications they were printed, or pulled in typewritten form from a jelly, often illegible, I do not remember reading the written word except displayed in the purple of indelible pencillings.

The main idea in trenches was, therefore, to keep them clean, in military phraseology, "at all costs." When a "flying pig," discharged from some hidden *minenwerfer*, scattered fragments of bone and flesh about the trench and pulverized bodies into its floors, there was added to those charged with rebuilding a complete outfit of men and material, like plasterers, to remove the stains of war. And so desirable was cleanliness that no Staff Officer blanched with rage as he observed a bayonet, certainly well oiled and shiny, sticking in the parapet, a wire noose hanging from its end. The rats preferred the gangway of the clean sandbags to the risk of Thomas Atkin's feet, and made well-marked tracks from their headquarters in a visitation to our lines and dugouts. The attentions of the sentry by night were divided between keeping one watchful eye on the enemy in front, and the other on his noose. In those days we were creditable rat-catchers.

The other major diversion for the purpose of keeping us in good military fettle was the wiring party. To ensure that these parties disported themselves properly an elaborate cross-columned report was designed. This had to be sent by workers "through the usual channels" to those who ordained our destiny. A kind of clocking-in system without the clock ; and no pay for over-



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ABOVE: BIVOUACS IN THE FRONT LINE

BELOW: HIS MAJESTY THE KING WITH H.R.H. THE PRINCE OF WALES AND GENERAL RAWLINSON, COMMANDING THE 4TH ARMY, VIEWING A BRITISH SOLDIER'S GRAVE ON THE SOMME BATTLEFIELD, JULY 1916



A GERMAN MACHINE-GUN TEAM

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"PATHS OF GLORY"

Artist's Copyright

From the painting by C. R. W. Nevinson.

time, no workmen's compensation. I suppose that somewhere far behind a gang of clerks worked out the number of miles of wire absorbed by the trenches, I say "absorbed" advisedly, against the number issued. But it was required to inform somebody of the number of men engaged, the number of stakes driven, the number of hours of work, the number of coils of wire used. There was no column for casualties. Battalions and Brigades were pitted against one another in the ordeal of staking wire in "No Man's Land." Reproof descended "through the usual channels" upon the head of him or those who used least wire.

Since it was a highly perilous business to stand in "No Man's Land," bent double with the most favourable target exposed to the enemy, while machine-gun bullets flicked around; and, as a rocket soared into the air, to be obliged to plunge face downwards among the wire and tins and gangrened muck, we devised a plan. The work charts invited an easy lie, but the inspecting staff, like foremen on a job, prevented this. "Number of coils of wire laid out." Good enough! The inspecting staff would not put his head over the parapet. Not if he knew it! So, though good defences were made, the zeal of the troops in the consumption of wire was such that Battalion vied with Battalion, and Brigade with Brigade, in laying out coils of wire. Up they came into the trenches; and, duely, just as they came they were laid out in "No Man's Land." It was even a popular rumour at one time that German patrols came over to the British side of "No Man's Land" and collected for their own use the coils of barbed wire thus laid out. And from our sector all was quiet. There was nothing to report.

A full, fresh-throated chorus from Béthune now sang the songs of the War. These have since been carried to all quarters of the earth. They are heard in the bazaars of India, among the foothills of the Himalayas, in the kraals of South Africa, and are chanted by nomads in the deserts of the Sudan. "Community singers" shout them uproariously so that they have passed into the currency of every gathering of men.

Some were sung with gladness, or just for the sake of singing something. Others were chanted with bitterness, a new-born cynicism which flung the patriotic optimism of the Hippodrome's "Business as Usual" across the charnel heaps of the Somme.

When we've wound up the watch on the Rhine,
How we'll sing, how we'll sing Auld lang syne!

A watch never wound, but always kept. And that other from the same medley :

Are we downhearted ? No !
Never worried ? No !

Good enough for the Base camps, but a poor measure to which later to tread the " duck-tracks " of Passchendaele.

I do not remember hearing " Tipperary " sung, except when on leave at the Folies Bergères in Paris. A lady, costumed in something about the size of a pocket handkerchief, kilted, sang this song amid uproarious applause. But the words were not apropos

Good-bye Piccadilly,
Farewell Leicester Square,
It's a long, long way to Tipperary,
But my heart's right there.

If " Tipperary " was sung in the training camps of England, men dropped it overseas.

But every Battalion and every unit possessed its chant to the melody of " The Church's one Foundation." " We are Fred Karno's Army " with its last two lines :

Hoch ! hoch ! Mein Gott !
What a very fine lot
Are the lads of the M.G.C.

The chunk in the middle of the verse can be supplied *ad lib.* It was always profane and usually unprintable.

" Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile, smile, smile " went well everywhere. The tune possessed a comfortable lilt, and the words fitted every circumstance. There was no strutting patriotism about it. And especially it lacked that " Hurrah for little Belgium " spirit, where the peasants of Flanders rarely impressed beyond their sour spirit and disagreeable manner.

We liked the sentimental ones best, and sometimes would sit in a great barn at Béthune, set aside for such purposes, pleasantly fumed by clouds of tobacco smoke, warm by contact with hot humanity, and perhaps a little addled after a visit to the Globe or some other estaminet. And then we would sing " Keep the home fires burning," incidentally without knowledge that munition workers were on strike for higher wages, while men were blown to pieces for a bob or two a day. And some lads would hold hands while the lower lip quivered as they sang " Roses are blooming in Picardy " and like sentimental favourites.

In such an atmosphere the dark clouds might be turned inside out, though the boys might never come home.

From many visits to Armentières I think I know who may have been the heroine of the ribald song bearing the name of this city. She kept a vegetable and fruit store, with bright green shutters, in the Place. The fruits and greens on show, so rumour had it, were but a lure to other fruits behind the screen. I do not know. But I rather think that the song is a kind of immortal epitaph in memory of all those who chose to be indiscreet as Mademoiselle. The song did not pass into the currency of popular war ditties until after the Armistice; and I do not remember it in the Béthune days.

There is perhaps something lacking in our national temperament that war chants have no historic place. Indeed, instantly no song can be called to mind of which it can be said—To this men marched; this cheered them in retreat or lulled them to slumber around the camp fires.

Music and poetry play a great part in all national movements, though in English life it is little apparent. In Germany, "Die Wacht am Rhein" embodies the fervent Teutonic aspiration and expresses the iron Teutonic resolve. It was written by a young ironmaster, Max Schneckenburger, about 1840, and set to music fourteen years later by Wilhelm. The "Watch on the Rhine" is a model people's melody. Broad in phrase, well-marked in rhythm, and pulsating with vigour. The memory seizes it, the heart responds to its appeal.

Lieb Vaterland, mägst ruhig sein,
Fest steht und treu die Wacht am Rhein.

The German songs lacked nothing in aggressive patriotism, and the most popular were those which had carried the Prussians to victory in 1870, as "Sie sollen ihn nicht haben" and "Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?" Only the "Hymn of Hate" tended to oust the popularity of "Die Wacht am Rhein."

In France the "Marseillaise" asserted its supremacy, but was not much in evidence. There were others from the Revolution, like the "Chant de la Victoire" and "Le Chant du Départ." But these songs were inspirations. The "Marseillaise" was the work of a night.

"Mourir pour la Patrie" was written while its author awaited the guillotine.

We have no national marching songs, and those perhaps most

popular were borrowed from the American Civil War. "John Brown's Body" and "Marching through Georgia," and added to them exasperating repetitions of Yankee ragtime and some music-hall ditties.

Men always sang the National Anthem with gusto, standing rigidly to attention. Perhaps this sounds odd in an era in which kings are at a discount, and most of the European thrones are empty. But the rumour that the King was in France among his troops was like the passing of a magic wand over the hearts of his Warriors. And they cheered the youthful Prince to the echo when he came among them in Béthune. When we heard that the King had sustained a savage fall from his horse, dread for his safety clutched the heart. And I remember with what extraordinary pleasure by chance I saw his slight figure inspecting the craters beside Fricourt, after the Somme Big Push.

The King was often with us, and we felt the magic of his presence. The Prince was ubiquitous, turning up on all kinds of astonishing occasions, ploughing up the trenches for a peep, "blowing" into a dugout for a drink, pacing about in most unpleasant places, "tin hat" askew and smoking a "gasper," making himself familiar with the lie of the land, with men, and not least with our absurd vocabulary.

As to language, a substantial dictionary is required to contain all those words and phrases which expressed new missiles and their arrival, and the attitude of men towards one another, and a set of circumstances made from a combination of pantomime and high drama. One word, unprintable, on the other hand, was almost the sole adjective applied to everything and everybody; while the higher the rank the deeper the depth of bastardy. Of the vast vocabulary of phrases perhaps the best was "to scrounge." This delicate operation was expressed also "to win," "to get." "Scrounging" was theft. But in theory such theft was legitimate. A competent "scrounger" was indeed a blessing to his Battalion or Battery, deserving of much gratitude and praise. Government stores of all kinds were there to be won. Many, therefore, were the artifices employed to detain the sentries over dumps and stores, while "scroungers," with much stealth, carried off booty with which to supplement the fare and comfort of their fellows.

The transport drivers of Infantry Battalions were specialists in "scrounging." Those who controlled the Veterinary Services were obviously of opinion, perhaps rightly so, that only the worst things in horseflesh should be sent to draw the loads for Infantry,

and to carry its field officers. The horse lines and Batteries of Artillery were always, therefore, at the mercy of well-planned raids, especially on the night preceding a Divisional relief, after which Battalions would be miles from the scene of the raid. Ropes and halters were cut and the horses stampeded, while the best were won, and incriminating marks, like white blazers and socks, were drenched with creosote. So thriving a business was "scrounging," with such pride was it conducted, that during the height of the Battle of the Somme, I afterwards learned with much joy that the new mount with which my groom presented me after the battle had been "won" from an officer of the Indian Cavalry, while two squadrons of the Deccan Horse were waiting with picketed horses in the tumult of Caterpillar Valley. "Scrounging," with a Government as fair game, in days of Socialistic tendency, will perhaps remain with us.

The official attitude towards "scrounging" is indicated by the following paragraph from "Routine Orders, 33rd Division, 23rd June, 1917, Adjutant General's Branch."

"308. *Safeguarding of Transport.*

"Several cases have occurred recently of vehicles being removed from the vicinity of horse lines and billets during the night by unauthorized persons.

"Commanding Officers are responsible for the safeguarding of their vehicles, and should, by means of sentries or regimental police, take steps to prevent the possibility of such occurrences.

"It must be understood that in cases where precautions are not taken to properly safeguard wagons from being taken away by unauthorized persons, the Officer Commanding the Unit concerned will be held responsible for the value of the wagons removed."

The Commanding Officer was the whipping boy all the time. "Big fleas have little fleas . . . and so *ad infinitum*." The C.O. wasn't going to pay for wagon, G.S. one. Not if he knew it. So if a vehicle was removed from his lines by an "unauthorized person" during the night, then to replace the deficiency other "unauthorized persons" went out on the following night to remove and bring home another vehicle. The vicious circle; but on the whole rather good fun.

CHAPTER VII

THE SCYTHE OF DEATH

JULY 1916

Strategy of the Somme—The “break-through”—Manœuvre, infiltration and surprise—Unparalleled losses of July 1st—Marching to battle—Psychology of Infantry—A Somme battle described—Annihilation of the attack—Gaining the objective—The bayonet charge—The effect of battle strain.

We only want to take our wounds away
To some warm village where the tumult ends,
And drowsing in the sunshine many a day,
Forget our aches, forget that we had friends.¹

THE Battle of the Somme will abide in the history of the British race as an epic of national courage and fortitude. For military students, also, it remains of extraordinary interest, not least because of its lessons of vital importance to the conduct of strategy and tactics in modern warfare.

Let it be said at the outset that the tragedies of the Somme were perhaps in large measure due to divergent policies and councils of the Commanders-in-Chief. The grandiose strategical plan had never a chance of consummation.

Without reopening the controversial conflict between the Allied Commanders,² it may be simply stated that the attack astride the Somme had been planned originally as a supreme Allied offensive. The French attack south of the river, with one corps to its north, was to predominate, with the British plan subervient to that of its Ally. A frontal attack was projected as the first assault, with the “break-through” beyond the Flers Line before Bapaume, within two days of its initiation. It was then

¹ From “After the Battle,” by A. P. Herbert.

² Compare varying accounts given in *History of the Great War. Based on Official Documents. Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1916, to the 1st July*, by Brigadier-General Sir James Edmonds, C.B., C.M.G. *Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches*. *My War Memories*, by General von Ludendorff. *At G.H.Q.*, by Brigadier-General John Charteris. *Foch. The Man of Orleans*, by Captain Liddell Hart. *World Crisis*, by the Rt. Hon. Winston S. Churchill. *Diaries of Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson. Soldiers and Statesmen*, by Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson.

intended to make a great turning movement towards the north, and to roll back the German defences in disorder for many miles to the east. The heavy German assault at Verdun, totally unexpected by Marshal Joffre, depleted the French Divisions available for the plan of the Somme battle. When the attacks at Verdun had been stemmed Foch still favoured the original plan, with the "break-through" attempt. His view, as a rare instance in the history of the campaign, was supported by Haig, the cavalry man, whose spirit chafed at tactics divorced from the arm in which the Commander had learned his experience. After Verdun, Joffre was opposed absolutely to any great offensive during the year 1916; but was very ready for Haig to take the responsibility of striking the German line with limited objectives. And here Joffre's view was supported by one of the most able of the British subordinate commanders, Rawlinson, who commanded the 4th Army, which would be called upon to bear the brunt of the attack. Rawlinson favoured a series of attacks, following careful Artillery preparation, with limited objectives.

Shortly before the date planned for the offensive, namely the 1st July, it was learned definitely that the British attack, on a limited front of eleven miles north of the Somme, would be carried out with the support of only one French Army astride and to the south of the river. Foch, subordinate to Haig, was entrusted with French leadership. Haig still visualized the "break-through," while Rawlinson yet clung to the notion of a steady advance of the lines moving eastwards with limited objectives.

We now know from the Diaries of the Allied and German leaders, as well as from the military archives of Berlin, that the proposed British offensive was fully known to the German General Staff. Yet, so obvious was the concentration of Artillery and troops that the Germans believed, even so late as some days after the launching of the offensive, that the attack centring at Fricourt was but a feint; and that the main attack would be delivered with Haig's, and possibly French, reserves, farther north.

There was a period in the battle, after the first week, when there is little doubt¹ that a unity of view between responsible leaders could have achieved a "break-through" on a considerable scale. But this possibility was not due to the strategic and

¹ Compare *World Crisis*, by the Rt. Hon. Winston S. Churchill. *Foch. The Man of Orleans*, by Captain Liddell Hart.

tactical skill with which the first attack was accomplished. It may be attributed to the German command being unable to bring itself to believe in the folly of delivering a series of Infantry assaults, the denominator of success of which relied upon each part of the attack having penetrated an equal number of miles or yards to the east. There was no attempt by infiltration to discover weak points in the German defence, and by penetrating these to outflank positions of stubborn resistance. Rather, as the history of the battle shows, if any part of the front of the attack was held up did those responsible throw more and more troops from reserve to batter against resistance, while success was allowed to wait for days until the Germans had made use of time in which to erect a fresh resistance against it and to turn success into failure.

The British losses on the first day of the attack were the greatest in the military history of this country. Sixty thousand men perished on the 1st July.

The Despatches of Sir Douglas Haig make no attempt to cloak the fact that the German positions on the Somme were immensely strong. "During nearly two years preparation he has spared no pains to render these defences impregnable."

As one example of our casualties, the 8th Division within three hours had lost 218 out of 300 officers, and 5,274 out of 8,500 men who had gone over the top. Only momentarily did this Division succeed in penetrating the German system: by night-fall on the 1st July, the 180th German Infantry Regiment had retaken the trenches temporarily lost, the total loss of this Regiment opposing the 8th Division being eight officers and two hundred and seventy-three soldiers killed, wounded, and missing. Lord Haig's biographer, Colonel Boraston, who served at G.H.Q. and as Private Secretary to the Field-Marshal, records that "the events of 1st July bore out the conclusions of the British Higher Command and amply justified the tactical methods employed." The British losses on the Somme against those of Germany were in the proportion of two to one.

The failure of the Somme, and having regard to what was finally achieved each separate effort must be regarded as failure, was perhaps due, also, to the fact that the higher commanders did not place themselves in sufficiently close proximity to the battle front. The forces at their disposal were scarcely controlled or directed, that is at points of contact with the enemy. Gains were not exploited with sufficient speed: reserves were uselessly thrown against impregnable positions. The necessity of operating

in concert with the French may have induced the Commander-in-Chief to hold back. If so, the disputations among the Allied Staffs had a grave effect upon the British operations. Nevertheless, it remains true that if Haig believed in the possibility of the "break-through," he should have insisted that his will should prevail ; and Rawlinson should have been replaced in command of the 4th Army before the attack commenced. The International situation, also, did not at this moment demand a great offensive for the purpose of drawing German troops from the Italian or Eastern Front, or from that of the French.

Tactically, had the element of surprise been utilized, day by day, together with a policy of infiltration, it appears that the Battle of the Somme might have been attended by high success for the Allied arms, with far smaller losses. As it was British troops, following a bombardment notoriously ineffective for its purpose, were called upon to advance in long lines at walking pace, in the manner of an earlier century, against positions flanked by machine-gun fire and heavily defended by uncut barbed-wire entanglements.

There were at no time valid reasons for supposing, as did some of the politicians responsible for the direction of the War, that the situation on the Western Front corresponded with a siege, and that the principles applying to siege warfare must therefore govern military action. There was ample manœuvre space, even having regard to the hazard of the Channel ports and the danger of an enemy thrust between the Allied armies. French politicians may have been unwilling to surrender more territory to devastation by the enemy in order to facilitate a strategy which would lure the enemy into a dangerous salient pre-organized for scientific counter and flank attacks. The effect upon French public opinion, which obviously could not be informed, might possibly have been disastrous. No man can say. But certainly, until unity of command on the Western Front had been achieved, a strategy of manœuvre, indeed the only strategy hopeful of success, could not be entertained. The one was impossible without the other.

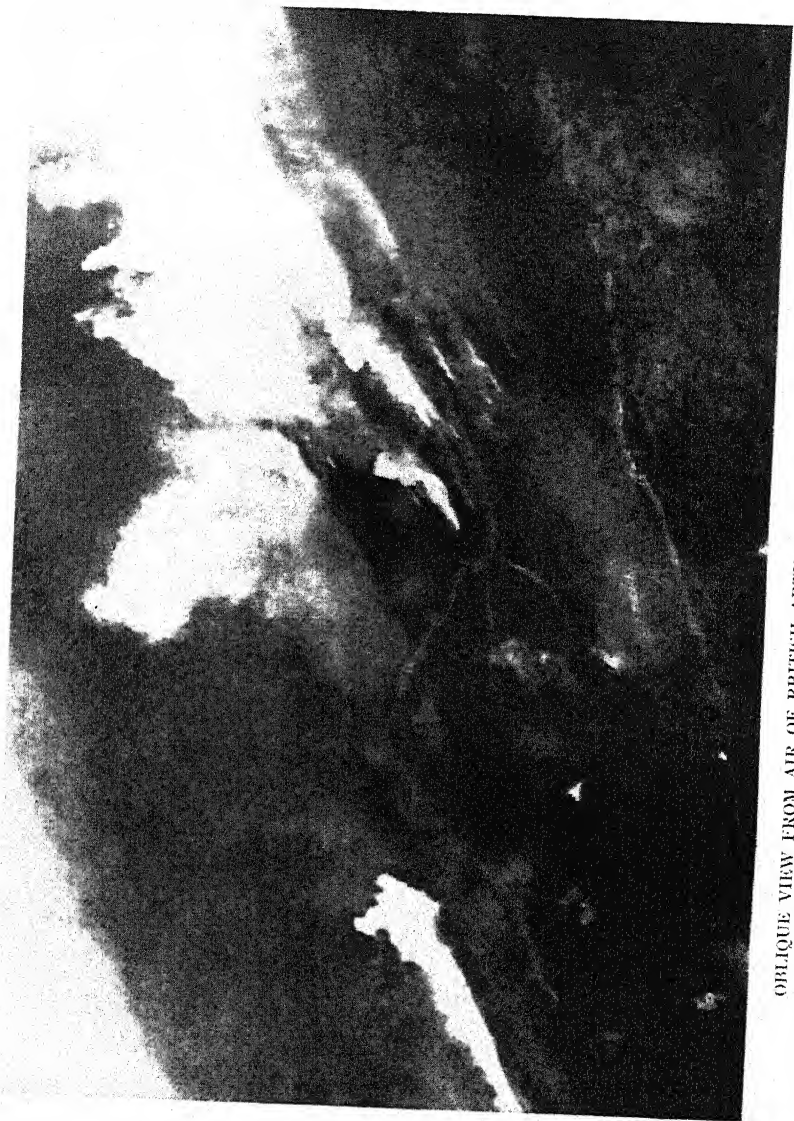
The carnage of the Somme was largely due to the failure of any one man in supreme command of the operation to impose his will in the direction of the assault.

They were no cynics, those Germans, who after the opening of the bombardment on the 23rd July placed on their parapets notice boards inscribed : " Come on. We are ready for you." The extraordinary preparations made for the Offensive were

fully known to the enemy. Day after day long lines of "sausage balloons" appeared on the horizon, carefully examining the elaboration of roads, the strengthening of bridges, and the making of new dumps of ammunition. Even so, the German High Command could not bring itself to believe that this so un concealed preparation was other than a bluff to cover some swift stroke of surprise which would be made farther north. Though the German reserves were not packed in behind the defences of the Somme front, but were retained in fluid state far behind, nevertheless German ingenuity and industry expended itself in the construction of successive lines of defence, heavily wired and well posted with machine-guns.

The preliminary bombardment well-nigh laid flat the German trenches. It is recorded that those who held the front lines were pulverized and deadened by the week's bombardment. But though they were beleaguered in the front systems, almost cut off by the severity of the cannonade from supplies and ammunition, their dugouts were immensely strong, and in these they heroically survived the bombardment, ready to defend the shattered front. On the 1st July, at steady pace, following a creeping barrage, long lines of British Infantry debouched from their trenches and entered "No Man's Land." The defenders were ready for them. As the barrage lifted, the Germans rushed from their dugouts and lashed the advancing troops with machine-gun fire. Across only eight out of the twenty miles of the assault front had the attack succeeded in winning the German trenches. On the left the attack of the 3rd Army, carried out by Snow's Corps, was a complete failure. Thousands of men perished without even reaching the German front line. Others who had obtained a lodging therein were cut from all reserves by an impassable barrage in their rear and were killed in combat, or starved of ammunition were obliged to surrender. And some who had made progress beyond the first trench system discovered that the enemy had come from the depths of their dugouts and now fought them from the rear, so that, attacked from all sides, with no line of retreat, they were annihilated.

The 4th Army fared better, carrying the battle front forward on a line from just north of La Boisselle to the south where they joined hands with the French. Foch's Corps, attended by good fortune, perhaps with better tactics, made great progress. Apparently it did not appear to the British Commander that the success was sufficiently wide for the "break-through," and renewed attacks, attended by no success and with great losses, were made



OBLIQUE VIEW FROM AIR OF BRITISH ARTILLERY BARRAGE ON GERMAN DEFENCES
Taken by a German aircraft.

*



GERMAN COUNTER ATTACK AT DAWN
Württembergers.

upon the northern sector. Meanwhile the attack in the centre at Fricourt and Mametz was thrust forward, but the progress was slow. It is not improbable that had Haig overruled the tactics of Rawlinson, flinging his reserves at the points where resistance had been broken, namely up the Mametz Valley to Bazentin, that the Flers Ridge, running through Martinpuich, High Wood and Delville Wood, could have been won by the 5th July. The German position at Thiepval could then have been pinched out in the curve of the River Ancre; and the German resistance to the north outflanked. As it was the British offensive marched slowly eastward, each day sustaining thousands of casualties, and each day permitting the defenders to bring up reserves and to strengthen their positions in rear.

The element of surprise yet remained with Sir Douglas Haig, for the German reserves had been held far to the east in anticipation of the expected British assault in the north. But the initial success between La Boisselle and Montauban was not exploited; and though a partial "break-through" might have been accomplished, the British offensive lingered, while the fresh reserves were weakened and destroyed in frontal attacks astride the River Ancre.

So much for history, yet necessary in order to understand and appreciate the mood of the Warrior who fought the Battle of the Somme, his difficulties, his disappointments.

The Division in which I commanded a company of machine-gunners was possessed of the highest fighting qualities. Without serious engagement or losses, yet amply experienced, it had been trained and stiffened to the conditions of war in the quiet Cambrin sector. It is senseless to think, as was suggested by some contemporary war correspondents, that British troops went to battle in the same mood as crowds flock to see a "football final." Nevertheless, it is equally absurd to state, as has been written by some post-war reporters, that men were driven like sheep to the slaughter. I doubt whether there was one man throughout the Division who was not eager to play his part in the great battle which all information led us to believe would throw back the German defences in disorder, and would, in fact, enable the "break-through," and hurry on the defeat of German arms.

We approached the task soberly enough, yet with high spirits. We entrained at Béthune for Amiens on the 12th July, informed only that the Somme offensive had already proved a high success, that great numbers of prisoners and guns had been captured, and that our task was to fulfil the rôle of pursuit. No information

had reached us of the disasters in the north, nor were we aware even of the extent of the front attack. Except of victory, we were in ignorance. I state this definitely, for even in command of a tactical unit as I was, no breath of misfortune reached me. And I know that my experience was the common lot of those charged with the renewed assault to the east. On the morning of the 13th we marched amid cheering crowds through the streets of Amiens. These inhabitants, who for many months had lived within the sound of gunfire, and had endured the destruction of the villages which two years earlier had fed the city, now acclaimed a victory which already seemed to liberate them from the German menace.

It is fourteen miles along the straight pavé road to Boiry Becordel, the village just west of the old front line. Throughout the march I found myself astonished and impressed with the magnitude of the preparations behind the attack. Though we had witnessed other concentrations of stores, material, and guns, the immensity of Armageddon along the line of route seemed to be beyond belief. "The Big Push" was in nothing lacking. The seesaw of the road across undulating downs, straight as a gun as far as eye could see, revealed, as we topped each rise, an endless procession to the east. Long columns of Infantry, Batteries of Artillery of all calibres, tractors, lorries piled high with rations and fodder, and others stacked with ammunition. Huge dressing stations, around whose outer portals hovered ambulances like bees around the hive, were laid out at the roadside. In the offing were new cemeteries. But always to give heart to sweating troops marching eastwards was the sight of squadrons of Cavalry cantering beside the roadside, pressing forward, their arms and accoutrements jingling the music of victory. Forging their way against the eastward pressing columns came an unending stream of ambulances in whose recesses men lay, screened from view, while others, lightly wounded, sat beside the driver and on the tails of the wagons.

"What's it like up there, chum?" would cry a voice from the ranks.

"Hell," was the reply; and that's the only answer I heard to many questions. A bewildering response in view of the optimistic official reports, freely circulated, of crumbling defences and sweeping victories.

Through dust and heat and a myriad flies, the sweating Division wound its way through Fricourt. Hugging the side of the road to let pass the endless traffic of ambulances, horses, lorries,

prisoners-of-war, water-carts, walking wounded, limbers, dispatch riders, food and fodder wagons which poured ceaselessly from the forward area, the column wriggled forward, stumbling and jostling while it exchanged familiar obscenities and blasphemies in jest, or in execration, with those who passed down the valley towards Corbie and Amiens.

The foul stench of trench sanitation, broadcast by a week's bombardment, and the nauseating reek of blood from the carnage of the shattered defences of Fricourt, held the air. Chaos was everywhere. From amid the brick-dust, twisted barbed wire, and ordnance and personal arms of all kinds, the serried ranks of Artillery bellowed their challenge to the German defence in the valleys and hills of Bazentin, three miles farther east.

At the head of a company of machine-gunners, weary, my body soaked with sweat, face thick with dust and streaked with lines from perspiration which poured from beneath a steel helmet, I plodded forward. My spirits were high : I had girded my loins for the attack ; and I think that something of the spirit of martyrs now dwelt in the soul.

The column crossed the German trench system early on the 14th July.

Up through the ruins of Montauban, where the enemy still grinned in his ghastly sleep, the Division wound its way along the pitted road. My eyes swept the bitter landscape, from a corner of which the shattered wooden crosses, in ragged disorder, beckoned to my disciplined and orderly spirit. The squat stump of an old fruit tree on the edge of a cemetery stripped of its leaves, curiously reminded me of a friendly veteran in the garden at home.

My Company was tried, had been refined. Sure. Sure as God made little apples . . . and here and everywhere death stalked. There would be no ripened fruit in the autumn. How many of the men who bravely stepped behind me would return ? How many in the presence of physical death were ready to put off this mortal body, as part of a wholesale massacre, limbs hurled hideously to the four winds, or crushed in the shambles of a dugout ? How many realized the fullness of spiritual life ?

I think I could read the thoughts of these untutored lads. The full tragedy of modern warfare was laid bare to the eyes of many for the first time. The ribaldry tossed from mouth to mouth was the camouflage for fresh horrors, which nearly every step revealed. The bloated carcasses of animals with distended stomachs lay in every ditch ; and each bend of the road multiplied

the bodies mutilated beyond recognition, distorted from almost any semblance of human form lying everywhere unburied. Poor little apples : fear was in many hearts, fear of the unknown. The air reverberated with the thunder of bombardment. Great shells hurled themselves through the trees shorn of their summer splendour, torn and jagged, and buried themselves beneath the undergrowth of Mametz Wood, hard by the bitter road. A burnt-out ambulance and abandoned stretchers, soaked with blood now clotted brown and fly-brown, piled themselves beside lines and groups of English soldiers, who had perished before the spluttering fire of machine-guns, which for long hours had seemed riveted to the corners of the wood.

As the road met Caterpillar Valley, above which stood the lone tree mocking both sides of the battlefield, chalk-whitened guides cowered beside deep dugouts cut from the banks of the sunken road.

My Company passed up the gentle slope to Bazentin, lying bleak, its shattered walls, gaunt, pink-dusted ruins echoing with the unceasing chatter of machine-gun fire, and wound its way through woods in which wild strawberries still held their sweet greeting for the passer-by : while a fitful bombardment plunged indiscriminate shell-fire among the clattering bricks, from the midst of which a splintered crucifix reared itself as the symbol of sacrifice.

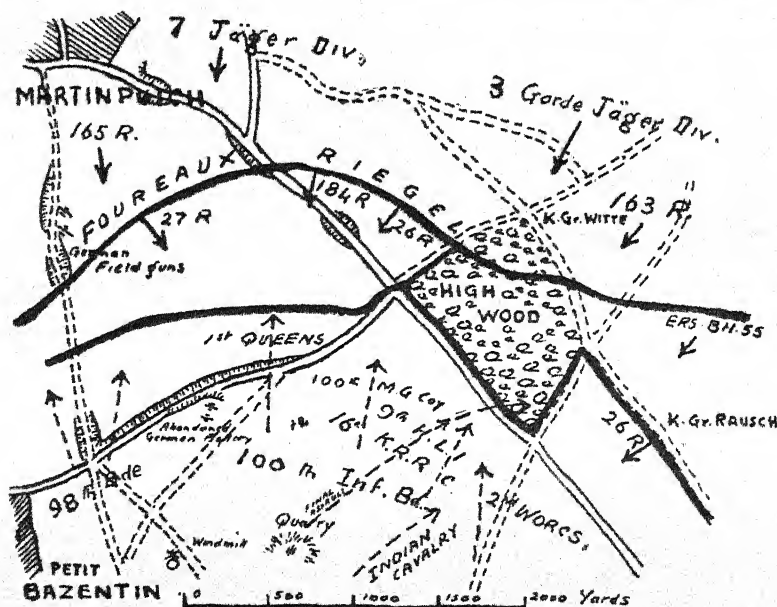
It was noon. The Company spread itself in a ditch from which across the valley through the dust and haze of the British bombardment, could be seen the leafy trees of High Wood, to the left flank the village of Martinpuich with its halo of pink brick-dust, and to the south, Delville Wood, sprawling upon the hill-side. And beside the wood, Waterlot Farm, the name familiar in all Flanders.

A runner, great beads of sweat on his brow, fear in his eyes, brought a message for me to report at Brigade Headquarters installed in a deep dugout, cut from the chalk of the hill-side.

The valley had been filled with tear-gas. Men, presenting the appearance of hideous pantomime figures from a Tibetan passion play, groped with monstrous nose and eye-pieces. I, dragging my feet through rifles, coils of wire, boxes of bombs, and those mechanical contraptions which are the panoply of war, with smarting blood-seared eyes, joined the group of Battalion Commanders behind the blanket curtain. My Brigadier explained briefly that the Battalion deploying in the valley east of

Bazentin, with the whole Division, was to attack at 9.30 the following morning. The objective was firstly High Wood and Martinpuich, and thence an unlimited field of advance through the city of Bapaume. The deployment ground was to be reconnoitred during the evening.

I returned to the Company, little better informed, but with a map, well marked with arrows pointing to the east. An unfortunate shell, during my absence, had killed one and wounded three men, one of whom I met upon the pathway, happy with



ATTACK ON HIGH WOOD, 15th JULY, 1916
(FOUREAUX-WALD)

men from other units with their "Blighty ones." Late in the afternoon, with my section commanders, I passed along the narrow road leading down to the valley, at the higher end of which, now wreathed in smoke, stood High Wood. For a few minutes I conversed with a Major of Indian Horse and learned that the Cavalry were concentrating in Caterpillar Valley and would break through, so soon as High Wood was captured, and this, the last line of German defence, had been pierced.

The British Artillery still continued its hurricane fire upon the wood, while observation officers directed it from vantage points in Bazentin. On my return, having viewed the ground for deployment, I questioned a gunner as to the enemy's disposition

and strength. "It's a cakewalk," replied the gunner. "Nothing can live there, my dear fellow, nothing can live there!"

During the night, patrols went out to make contact with the enemy. They were fired upon from the wood's edge and by riflemen lying out in scoops and in narrow trenches west and south of the village. They discovered that the Germans had laid out several strands of wire, uncut by the Artillery, and, hidden by the long grass, forming a considerable and dangerous obstacle. The Brigadier was wrathful: repeatedly he requested a further bombardment, but such requests were made in vain or were not practicable. He fumed with anger, cursed the higher command through the bristles of a red moustache. As a sound tactician he was not unfamiliar with the results to Infantry of a frontal attack against uncut wire, enfiladed by well-posted machine-guns.

"P.B.I.," I reflected, a sobriquet, so truthful: an Infantry so soused in blood.

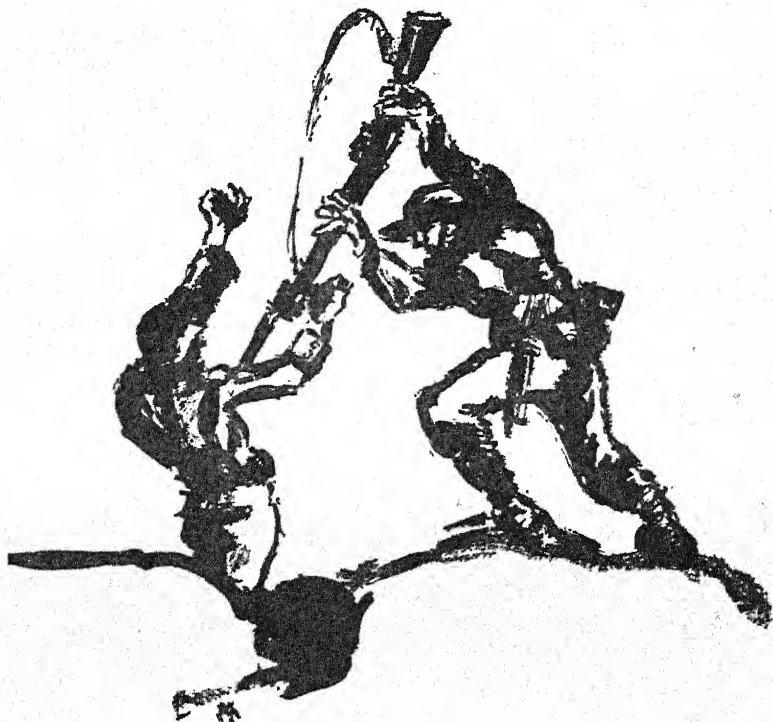
In the early morning, under cover of a thick mist, the 100th Brigade was deployed in the valley some eight hundred yards west of High Wood. A heavy dew was on the ground and hung like pearls upon each blade of grass. After the turmoil of the preceding night an eerie stillness pervaded the atmosphere. No shot was heard, except a faint echo from the flank.

Men spoke in whispers. Their faces were pallid, dirty, and unshaven, many with eyes ringed with fatigue after the night, hot and fetid, gaseous and disturbed by shell-fire, in Bazentin. Few there were whose demeanour expressed eagerness for the assault. They were moving into position with good discipline, yet listless, as if facing an inevitable. Their identity as individuals seemed to be swallowed up in the immensity of war: devitalized electrons. I, with my Company, was deployed behind the Glasgow Highlanders, which with the 16th King's Royal Rifles was to lead the assault upon the wood. By 8.30 a.m. the Brigade had deployed into position and lay down in the long grass awaiting the signal to assault, timed for an hour later.

I passed the time with dried blades of grass, chivvying the red ants and preventing them from crossing a narrow trench which I had scratched with a finger-nail. And I pencilled a sketch or two. It was restful and pleasant lying in the warm humid atmosphere, belly to the ground, in the quiet of the early morning.

I looked up suddenly. The mist was clearing, rising rapidly. The sun peered through, orange and round, topping the trees of High Wood. Then its rays burst through the disappearing mists, and all the landscape, hitherto opaque and flat, assumed its

stereoscopic vivid form. The wood seemed quite near, just above us up the hill-side ; a little to the left behind a broken hedge was an abandoned German battery, dead gunners and horses around it. The village of Martinpuich, jagged ruins and rafters all askew, broken walls and shattered fruit trees, looked down. Both trees and village appeared Gargantuan, and the men waiting to attack like midgets from Lilliput. From my cover I scanned the landscape. Not a shot was fired. The men crouching in the



grass must be visible to watchful observers in the wood, but all remained quiet. I glanced down at my watch. Ten minutes to go : the attack was timed for 9.30.

I could see the broad kilted buttocks and bronzed thighs and knees of the 9th H.L.I. lining the slope ahead of me. They were lying in regular lines. A wind seemed to stir the tall grass. My heart thumped in my throat. I raised my head as the Highlanders rose to their feet, bayonets gleaming in the morning sun. My eyes swept the valley—long lines of men, officers at their head in the half-crouching attitude which modern tactics dictate, resembling suppliants rather than the vanguard of a great

offensive, were moving forward over three miles of front. As the attackers rose, white bursts of shrapnel appeared among the trees and thinly across the ridge towards Martinpuich.

For a moment the scene remained as if an Aldershot manoeuvre. Two, three, possibly four seconds later an inferno of rifle and machine-gun fire broke from the edge of High Wood, from high up in its trees, and from all along the ridge to the village. The line staggered. Men fell forward limply and quietly. The hiss and crack of bullets filled the air and skimmed the long grasses. The Highlanders and Riflemen increased their pace to a jog-trot. Those in reserve clove to the ground more closely.

I, looking across the valley to my left flank, could see the men of the 1st Queen's passing up the slope to Martinpuich. Suddenly they wavered and a few of the foremost attempted to cross some obstacles in the grass. They were awkwardly lifting their legs over a low wire entanglement. Some two hundred men, their Commander at their head, had been brought to a standstill at this point. A scythe seemed to cut their feet from under them, and the line crumpled and fell, stricken by machine-gun fire. Those in support wavered, then turned to fly. There was no shred of cover and they fell in their tracks as rabbits fall at a shooting battue.

Up the slope before me, the line of attack had been thinned now to a few men, who from time to time raised themselves and bounded forwards with leaps and rushes. I could see men in the trees taking deliberate aim down upon those who still continued to fight, or who in their scores lay dead and wounded on the hill-side.

My orders were to move forward in close support of the advancing waves of Infantry. I called to my Company, and section by section in rushes we were prepared to move forward. As we rose to our feet a hail of machine-gun bullets picked here an individual man, there two or three, and swept past us. I raised a rifle to the trees and took deliberate aim, observing my target crash through the foliage into the undergrowth beneath. On my right, an officer commanding a section had perished and all his men, with the exception of one who came running towards me, the whole of the front of his face shot away. On my left two other sections had been killed almost to a man, and I could see the tripods of the guns with legs waving in the air, and ammunition boxes scattered among the dead.

With my runner, a young Scot, I crept forward among the dead and wounded who wailed piteously, and came to one of

my guns mounted for action, its team lying dead beside it. I seized the rear leg of the tripod and dragged the gun some yards back to where a little cover enabled me to load the belt through the feed-block. To the south of the wood Germans could be seen, silhouetted against the skyline, moving forward. I fired at them and watched them fall, chuckling with joy at the technical efficiency of the machine. Then I turned the gun, and, as with a hose in a garden, sprayed the tree-tops with lead.

The attack of the Rifles and Highlanders had failed ; and of my own Company but a few remained. My watch showed that by now it was scarcely ten o'clock. I hurriedly wrote a message reporting the position and that of the attack for the Colonel of the 2nd Worcestershires, a gallant soldier and good friend, who was in a sunken road with his battalion in reserve three hundred yards to the rear. I gave this to my runner.

"Keep low," I said, "and go like blazes," for the waving grass was being whipped by bullets, and it scarcely seemed possible that life could remain for more than a few minutes.

A new horror was added to the scene of carnage. From the valley between Pozières and Martinpuich a German field battery had been brought into action, enfilading the position. I could see the gunners distinctly. At almost point-blank range they had commenced to direct shell-fire among the wounded. The shells bit through the turf, scattering the white chalk, and throwing aloft limbs, clothing, and fragments of flesh. Anger, and the intensity of the fire, consumed my spirit, and, not caring for the consequences, I rose and turned my machine-gun upon the battery, laughing loudly as I saw the loaders fall.

I crept forward among the Highlanders and Riflemen, spurring them to action, giving bullet for bullet, directing fire upon the machine-gun nests, whose red flashes and wisps of steam made them conspicuous targets. The shell-fire increased from both flanks, and the smooth sward became pitted and hideous, but as each shell engraved itself upon the soil, a new scoop of cover was made for the safety of a rifleman.

A Highlander, terror in his eyes, lay on his back spewing blood, the chest of his tunic stained red. I tore open the buttons and shirt. It was a clean bullet wound, and I gave words of encouragement to the man, dragging him to a shell cavity, so that in a more upright position he could regain strength after the swamping of his lungs, and then creep back to safety.

The dismal action was continued throughout the morning, German fire being directed upon any movement on the hill-side.

Towards noon, as my eyes searched the valley for reinforcements or for some other sign of action by those directing the battle, I descried a squadron of Indian Cavalry, dark faces under glistening helmets, galloping across the valley towards the slope. No troops could have presented a more inspiring sight than these natives of India with lance and sword, tearing in mad cavalcade on to the skyline. A few disappeared over it : they never came back. The remainder became the target of every gun and rifle. Turning their horses' heads, with shrill cries, these masters of horsemanship galloped through a hell of fire, lifting their mounts lightly over yawning shell-holes ; turning and twisting through the barrage of great shells : the ranks thinned, not a man escaped. Months later the wail of the dying was re-echoed among the Himalayan foothills . . . "weeping for her children and would not be comforted."

I realized the utter futility of any further attempt to advance, and bent my energies to extricating such men as remained alive and unwounded from the battleground, now the point of concentration of gun and machine-gun fire, upon which it was suicide to remain. During the advance I had noted a small chalk quarry, screened by a low hedge. My runner rejoined me with another youngster, and together we dismantled the machine-gun and, after passing the word among those few who survived, for withdrawal, with my sergeant who laid strong hands on the ammunition boxes, we commenced the retirement to this position of better advantage.

Half-way down the slope a shell burst almost at our feet, tearing the tripod from my hands and throwing me face downwards. I rose immediately through the smoke. The lad, still clasping the gun to his side, both legs shattered and a stream of blood pouring from under his helmet, lay unconscious. We carried the broken body into the quarry. Tenderly we stripped the wounded lad's jacket, and cut away the blood-stained trouser-ends and puttees, removing the boots. We bound the broken legs with first-aid dressings and made tight tourniquets above the knees to prevent further loss of blood. The lad had served with me since the formation of the Company and had always been interesting. He was a dreamer and used to sit on the edge of my dugout at La Bassée and tell me of his dreams. The lad was half-way to Heaven ; and though he had purged his soul for a celestial life, he was as good a gunner as ever I experienced.

"It's a miracle if 'e lives," said the sergeant. "Those legs are pulp : they'll 'ave to come off." Many minutes passed, then



GERMAN STORM TROOPS TAKING COVER IN SHELL HOLES PREPARATORY TO AN ADVANCE

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ABOVE: PREPARING TO ADVANCE; "FIX BAYONETS"

BELOW: LEWIS-GUN TEAM IN FRONT LINE

the lad shuddered a little and opened his eyes. He winced, as in his recovering consciousness he sought to move, and the pang of pain shot through his body. Tears flooded his eyes as he realized his impotence.

"Hutchy," he whispered, one of those rare occasions in soldiering days in which a man addressed me by the familiar name by which I was known by the rank and file, "is it bad?"

I bent my ear to the strained words. "A smack in the legs, that's all, kid. Just stick it," I replied. "Then we'll be able to get you down the line."

The wounded man smiled around him at the familiar faces, then closed his eyes.

There was nothing to do but wait.

Once I gazed across the edge of the quarry. Great shells plunged continuously upon the slope before me, the ceaseless rattle of masketry reverberated against the hill-side, and echoed among the ruins of Bazentin. Martinpuich and the wood were wreathed in smoke, shrouded in columns of dust. The stench of blood and gas pervaded the hot atmosphere: it sickened the throat and caught the lungs tightly.

Death had cut swiftly with his scythe, and now his foul breath fanned the nostrils with the nauseating reek of blood, he winked his eye from aloft with each burst of shrapnel, and his harsh laugh chattered from the mouths of a score of machine-guns.

Half an hour passed, then the wounded lad re-opened his eyes. The brightness in them had departed.

"Give me some water," he panted. I pressed his emptying bottle to the lips, placing my arm around his shoulders. I was all too familiar with the look, in which the brightness of vitality was disappearing with the pallor which robbed the skin of its warm texture.

I pressed my forefinger to the pulse: its beats were slow.

Around the quarry the turmoil heightened in its fury. The ground heaved and shuddered: great tufts of earth were hurled through the air. The descending metal bore down upon the dead and wounded, grinding battered bodies to pulp, or throwing dismembered limbs high in the air.

The lad's face paled, his lips blue, and a troubled look came for a moment into his eyes; then they brightened, an expression of ecstasy lighting the face. "Look . . . look . . . the Cross," he whispered. I glanced across the lip of the quarry, and the eyes of others crouching beside me followed my own. As it were suspended between Martinpuich and High Wood there appeared

to be a brilliant light with wide wings shaped like some giant aeroplane. It hovered above the scene of carnage. A shiver passed through the wounded man's body. For a moment he clung tightly to me, then the whole body relaxed. I glanced down quickly. Death looked from the eyes of a machine-gunner, but a smile lay on the blood-flecked lips.

The fall of shells had suddenly ceased on our immediate front. As the area previously had been a maelstrom of explosives, so now, except for wisps of smoke hovering above the shell-holes, and bitter cries of the few wounded who still miraculously had survived the bombardment and now whimpered piteously for aid, or screamed in delirium and with hysteria, all was calm. The light still persisted.

My remaining N.C.O., a realist always, spoke. "A new stunt by the Staff. . . . Good one this time. . . . Better than Cavalry."

But on our immediate front all for a moment was quiet, and after surveying the landscape I said grimly, "We're going on now, Sergeant."

"That's good, sir : been in this 'ole long enough for the good of our 'ealth."

"Tighten up your belts, lads," I ordered. "We're going to advance in short bounds. After the first rush, take cover beside a casualty. Fill up with his ammunition and iron rations. I'll give you a few minutes for that . . . then on. We are going for the wood. Between each rush take good cover . . . are you ready? . . . right, come on!"

Forty-one men, remnants of three regiments, rushed over the lip of the quarry and ran swiftly forward through the long dried grass. Not a shot greeted us. I, disciplined warrior, every sense alert, threw myself beside the equipment which still clung intact to the torso of a Highlander, stripped almost naked and splashed with the blood which had poured from the distorted figure. I snatched the clips of ammunition, thrusting them into my pouches, and ransacked the haversack for rations. The water-bottle had been pierced and drained. With the aid of elbows and toes I wriggled forward to another figure lying face down to the ground, unslung the water-bottle, hot in the blazing sun, and added it to my equipment. I glanced round me : some men were ready, crouching like cats, heads sunk in cover behind the dead or in shell-pits, others completing their task. I raised my head slowly and viewed the wood. The storm of battle, shrapnel, machine-gun and rifle fire, still raged on either flank, while German heavy shells crashed in Pozières and Montauban.

The tree-tops of the Bois de Foureaux, once safe harbour for pigeons, giving shade to peasant lovers, now the High Wood of battle, murder and of sudden death, hung as crazy scarecrows, their broken branches waving in mockery. They assumed fantastic human form, buffoons on stilts, the leaves, at the twig ends, a feathery motley with which to crown man's vengeance upon Nature at the zenith of her summer glory. From a birch hung the limp body of a too daring sniper, the beheaded trunk like a flour sack caught in the fork of a branch, while blood had poured down the silver surface of its trunk, whereon it had silted, black and obscene. I offered a prayer and a curse, brief, the gasp of an overwrought soul, for my little band of followers.

Then I rose. With a swift rush we swept forward, the softness of bodies yielding to our step. A wounded man called to me, his plaintive wail tearing the heart. I dammed the source of my compassion, and set myself to the purpose of the moment, then again dropped for cover and rest. No shot was fired. A third rush. The party on its narrow front in a thin irregular line was within forty yards of the wood's edge. I whispered the words to left and to right, "Fix bayonets." Once more my lads rose from the blood-soaked fields in a mad rush.

If there had been any martyr in my soul it had turned beast in the Pantheon of this modern Ephesus. I was murderer, breath coming in short gasps, teeth set, hands clenched round my rifle, nerves and sinews tense with life. "An eye for an eye, a tooth for tooth." Four German soldiers raised their arms in surrender. I could hear the breath of the Sergeant coming in deep snarls beside me. I crashed through the undergrowth, rifle and bayonet levelled to the charge, my great strength and weight gathered behind the thrust. A man, bearded and begrimed with battle, crumpled before my bayonet. The Sergeant pierced another as a knife goes through butter. A soldier, his arm broken, cowered back against a machine-gun, hands raised, face blanched with terror. With a cry he turned to run. I thrust with my bayonet at the full extent of a strong arm. The man stumbled and fell back, his weight dragging the rifle from the hand of his slayer.

I glanced about me, a stick-bomb in hand. The three Germans lay awry and huddled at my feet, and my men were now extended in a narrow trench a few yards within the wood. Other Germans stood to a flank, making overtures of surrender, and then came forward. Someone threw a bomb, then others. The Germans fell splattered with blood, lacerated and hideous. The bloodthirsty

battle fury in me died down as I wiped the sweat from my eyes. I looked to the skies : the light which the lad had made me see had gone. Hypnotism, hallucination, self-deception, insanity ? I wonder.

I dropped for cover as a German stick-bomb sped through the tree stumps. German shells were falling anew in the valley to the rear. Behind Bazentin the sun was sinking in a blood-red sky, a fitting epitaph to its day.

Quickly the trench was reversed, and the German machine-gun manned and placed in position to ward off any counter-attack. I wrote a short message, giving my position, and handed it to a lad, whom I chose as a runner to Brigade Headquarters.

Something was astir in the minds of the General Staff behind. A shrapnel barrage descended on the farther edge of the wood. My men and I were isolated, marooned in this distant corner of the "No Man's Land" of battle. Perhaps our advance had been seen by the watchers from the road in Bazentin. Dusk fell. Again and again I tapped out a brief message from my flash lamp to the trees and ruins in rear. "S O S" I spelt, "S O S." My party, cold in the night air with the dampness of sweat which had soaked their bodies, ate their frugal rations, greedily drank from the abandoned water-bottles of the enemy, and waited in vigilant watch. After two hours the familiar jangle of equipment was heard. Men were moving up the valley towards the wood. Relief. Soon I was among Welch Fusiliers of the 19th Brigade, on the left Battalions of the 98th Brigade, and others from Manchester, men fresh from divisional reserve. They had orders to send back any of my Brigade.

It is coincidence worthy of record that the 93rd Foot (2nd Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders) in the days which ensued, not only fought alongside the 1st Battalion in the 101st Brigade, on our right, but were opposed by the German 93rd Regiment. The other troops opposed to us were Battalions of the 27th, 72nd, 77th, 163rd, 165th, and 184th Regiments, and later the Garde Jäger Division. The 163rd Regiment actually held High Wood itself during the attack on the morning of the 15th. During the Division's assaults on the 20th, the 93rd was again in the line between the Wood and Martinpuich, with the 165th Regiment holding High Wood and the 72nd Regiment on its left. So the same Regiments were again locked in death grips at High Wood. The fight is known to German history as the "Englischer Angriff am Fourceaux-Wald."

Forty-one men who had witnessed a miracle went back in

file across the valley littered with dead. Released now from the strain of vigilance which had held death at bay, we stumbled with fatigue in the paling light. Stretcher bearers moved, turning over the fallen to discover if any yet lived, lifting the wounded, giving succour to those whose vitality had so ebbed that they could never withstand the renewed agony of the long journey down the road already dubbed "The Valley of Death." We reached Bazentin, in which high explosive still fitfully burst with loud detonation and which reeked of the sickly sweetness of gas. The Brigade Staff Captain, wounded a few minutes later, stood on the road. He peered at me. "Who are you?" he asked.

"Hutchison," I replied.

"Had a rough time?" he queried. "Have you come from High Wood? Was it you who sent through the runner?"

"Yes," I replied. "Glad the kid got through."

"All right, take your party down to Brigade Headquarters—bottom of the hill on the left. Rum issue!" he called to the men; and to me he added, "The General wants to see you. Well done!"

We passed on down the valley. I was back again, a return to the dugout at which orders for the attack had been issued but twenty-four hours earlier. Eleven only of the forty-one men now with me belonged to my Company: the others, stragglers from three regiments, the flotsam of a lost generation, survivors of disaster, and living witnesses of revelation.

I passed down the timbered stairway to the Brigadier's Headquarters. I stooped, entering the dugout, and momentarily was blinded by the flickering lights which threw weird shadows against the chalk-hewn white of the walls. The General with two staff officers was studying a map. He looked up quickly as I—ghastly figure of the modern gladiator—saved from the jaws of death, unshaven, heavy-eyed, begrimed, bloodstained, stood before him. I saluted. "Captain Hutchison," I said hoarsely.

The Brigadier tipped his peaked hat on his head and glanced at me with those vivid blue eyes, which in sharp contrast to the red hair seemed so brilliant, magnetic, and inspiring in a Commander. Deep lines shadowed his keen face, but the set mouth curved a trifle and the eyes were beacons of welcome.

"Sit down, Hutchison," invited the General, pouring out a stiff whiskey. "Drink that."

The strong spirit smote the back of my throat, and I gulped it gratefully.

"Relief all right?" questioned the General.

I nodded my assent.

"You've done very well . . . very well. I did not think it possible to reach High Wood. How many men were with you?"

"Forty-one, sir. They are all back now."

I stared at the table for a moment, fingering an unlighted cigarette nervously. The General thrust a candle towards me. I still remained silent, staring at the light, then put my cigarette to it and inhaled a whiff of smoke.

"What was the light over High Wood, sir?" I said, intently watching the General, who looked perplexed. "Like an aeroplane . . . just before we went forward . . . that was at 5 p.m. . . . stopped the shells . . . not a shot was fired when we attacked. We got into High Wood without the loss of a man."

A look of astonishment crossed the General's face. "You are tired out, Hutchison," he exclaimed. "You will remember everything in the morning." He refilled my glass. "You had better sleep now. The Staff Captain has arranged for that, and you will find your men in the dugouts just outside."

I gulped the spirit and withdrew unsteadily, my senses doped with fatigue, and then lay down to sleep.

CHAPTER VIII

SOME BACKWATERS

AUGUST 1916

The magnitude of a citizen army—Loss in individual morale—Reinforcing—Value of Territorial organization—Stagnation on the Somme—Machine-gun batteries—The "Conscientious Objector"—Flanders and Picardy in military history—A Brigadier's war—Post-war reporting—The sense of happiness—Padres—Amiens—Topography of the Somme battlefields.

I was so happy to be alone,
So full of love for the great speechless earth,
That I could have laid my cheek in the grasses
And caressed with my lips the hard sinewy body
Of Earth, the cherishing mistress of bitter lovers.¹

THE failure to capture the Ridge running through Martinpuich, High Wood, and thence south-east, must have convinced G.H.Q. that the idea of the "break-through" was doomed. My own Division, shrunk to but a third of its fighting strength, was withdrawn from the battle and bivouacked beside Albert to await reinforcement.

Previously, as part of a Division, Brigade, Battalion, or even as an individual, one had felt oneself a definite unit of the Army. One now seemed to be engulfed in the colossal panoply of war. A man seemed to lose his identity as an individual. Divisions were swallowed up in terms of Corps and Armies. Probably, for this reason, from this point in the War one seemed no longer to regard death as individual. Death claimed so many friends and men one had never seen before. Reinforcements would arrive; one never knew their names, they disappeared so quickly through the dressing stations, or to swell the number of the little wooden crosses. The individual man was gone. His soul survived despite the orders which moved him from point to point in the battlefield, not as a man but as a molecule in a body of 120,000 troops.

This new phenomenon should be appreciated. For it was a

¹ From "A Moment's Interlude," by Richard Aldington.

factor which from this point began to influence the whole of national life until it laid such a grip upon us that in the later days of the War we were in peril of coming entirely under the spell of the Military system. Conscription, Bureaucracy, Officialdom, must all have started from this point when our Government began to think in terms of Armies and not in terms of Platoons.

The personal equation is a definite force in an army. A high moral is its strongest quality. Individual moral is the germ of its success. It was left for the regimental officer who understood this to see that so great a quality did not perish while the Staff of necessity became absorbed in the questions of Grand Tactics, Strategy, and super-organization. In our national life, also, it was left for little men to preserve this quality in the national heart, while the bureaucrat and official chivvied him from pillar to post in a mad endeavour to turn a free people into a bureaucratic state. The bureaucrat boasted of framing a policy and modelling his schemes upon those of organized Germany. Probably few other than the humble recruiting officer at home, before the days of conscription, and the regimental officer in the field, fully realized that an appeal to the soul of the national Ideal, of which there was the germ in every Briton's heart, could make men do what rules and orders and laws could never accomplish.

The eyes of generalship seemed dimmed to the greatest factor of success in leadership—leadership in war, no less than leadership in industry. The personal equation was lost, where, with a great civilian army, it should have been paramount. In the armies of France—the civilian force of a Republic—the personal equation was the keystone of their training, efficiency, and *esprit de corps*. In our army, such expressions as “On *vous* aura !” and “Ils ne passeront pas !” were seldom heard. Marshals Foch and Joffre referred to their troops with the inspiring and personally affectionate term, “Mes enfants !” In our army such terms of affection were mostly deprecated. Those officers who knew the value of perfect camaraderie and were daring enough to practise it, did so in the teeth of obsolete opposition. Yet there must have been many who felt it strongly. We are not the cold, unbending race we are so often supposed to be. But we are invariably fearful of exposing our hearts. Common danger, the mingling and interruption of caste, forced this. The Higher Command, who rightly were not called upon to sit freezing in a bitter wind in the hell of a bombardment, could seldom have felt how this new Freemasonry bared the soul



"BACK TO BILLETS"

From the painting by Eric Kennington.

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"A MAN WITH A CIGARETTE"
From the painting by Sir William Orpen, R.A

✱

of spoiling conventionalism, and left the heart of peer and peasant stripped naked before its God. It could think in no terms less than those of Divisions. And so it forgot man and his throbbing heart, his soul ; his weakness, and his love—a love passing the love of woman.

Man's soul never died. It was triumphant. Its very vitality formed the new Freemasonry—that of common danger. The Freemasonry of the Trenches had its various degrees. The Grand Master was no more necessarily General or Commanding Officer than private soldier. This was a question of degree—the first degree of Mons, the second of the Marne, the third of Ypres, the fourth of La Bassée, the fifth of Loos, and so on. The cynic may think the point is laboured. We of that Masonry know it is not so.

An illustration of the new attitude of the Staff towards troops is well provided from the method of reinforcement which followed in the wake of the Somme. The determination seems to have been that if the strength of a Battalion had been depleted through casualties, then it must be completed from a great pool of men held at the Base. If three hundred men were needed, three hundred were taken from the pool and despatched, without regard to territorial affiliation or race. Thus it happened, for example, that while we waited beside Albert some hundreds of men, wearing kilts, and I believe Scotsmen, commanded by a variety of officers who had already served with other regiments, arrived as reinforcements to the 2nd Worcestershires. This unit, as such, required officers and men. Here then was the requirement fulfilled. Officers and men had arrived earmarked for the regiment.

At the same moment there arrived as reinforcements to the Glasgow Highlanders, the kilted Territorial Battalion of the Highland Light Infantry, a draft of other hundreds of men, also led by a variety of officers, all clad in flat caps and trousers. The 9th H.L.I., as an infantry unit, needed men to complete its strength. They had arrived. Both battalions served in the same Brigade. Both commanders within the hour had sent urgent protests to Brigade Headquarters. It was fortunate in this particular instance that the drafts could be exchanged between the two battalions, so that the Worcestershires, at least in outward form, were still of Worcestershire ; and the Highlanders possessed some affiliations with the Clyde.

This habit, however, of breaking down the traditional system of Territorial recruiting was one to be deplored. It is a method of reinforcement which strikes at the very roots of morale ; and

it is for this reason that experienced commanding officers have always fought it strenuously. A commanding officer of Infantry in the field, whether in attack or defence, cannot be held responsible for the behaviour of human material, the idiosyncrasies of which he does not understand.

The indestructible cohesion of battalions such as the 2nd Worcestershires, or the 1st Queen's (Royal West Surreys), typical of the British Army, is based firstly upon hereditary resolution. That resolution is founded not least upon common dialect and environment, a mutual confidence and respect resulting from generations of close association. The fact that cohesion is weakened by breaking the tradition is proven when the student examines the behaviour of larger formations. In the 19th Brigade, for example, though its constituent units fought well enough beside each other, or in support of one another, there was not much love lost between the 1st Middlesex and the 93rd; and later in its history between the Royal Welch Fusiliers and the Scottish Rifles. These observations are true not only of the British Army, but of the German. Bavarians, Saxons, Prussians, Hanoverians, did, and do, differ widely in psychology and custom. No Bavarian Commander would have tolerated Saxon reinforcement within his own ranks. Nor was it attempted. Similarly it was a false understanding of the nature of the Warrior to attempt to force him to live his life and fight its battle in the ranks of alien units. It is not remarkable, therefore, that men returned wounded to the Base camps, however great the disasters which might have befallen them, clamoured to be sent back to the units in whose ranks they had fallen. At least, for example, the Worcestershire lad would find one friend who had fished the waters of "the cut," or another who had raced whippets beside Cradley Heath.

Therein lay happiness. And that, after all, is the only thing for which men were prepared to exist at all. Granted that freedom of mind, men would do battle with all the courage and endurance of which this record is but a testimony. Had the Staff prevailed, exercising a materialistic judgment against traditional sentiment, the design of Lord Haldane, from his wisdom fashioned to meet a world catastrophe, would have perished, and with it perhaps the morale of British Infantry.

By the third week in August, when my Division was called upon to renew the attack, a network of trenches had been burrowed along the edge of High Wood. The terrain from Martinpuich to Longueval now resembled the La Bassée front

tipped upwards to the east. The Germans still occupied the Ridge ; and themselves had constructed what was named the Switch Line. This is the *Foureaux Riegel*, with its communications, the first of which was the *Kronprinzen Weg*, connecting the Switch defences with the main Flers Line. High Wood, the pivot of the Switch, was a veritable fortress. The war of movement had come to a standstill ; and we could now only hope to



secure small tactical advantages by wresting the higher ground from German occupation. Following some minor essays to establish further posts in the shattered wood, in which we lost seven hundred and ninety-nine officers and men, whose assault was repelled by liquid fire, the Division was called upon in a final throw of the dice to capture the Switch at all costs.

For days we toiled through the perils and horrors of the Valley of Death, loading ammunition at "the Green Dump."

The Mametzer Tal, the narrow valley running through Fricourt to Bazentin, was the only road of communication to our forward positions. The German gunners, long used to every fold in its topography, knew its every inch. The Valley, so well named that of Death, was incessantly bombarded, the roadsides being heaped with corpses and carcasses bloated with the summer sun, with shattered wagons and burnt-out ambulances. Such filthy gasses exuded from the bodies, creating a stench unbearable, that the passenger might almost thank his God that the German gunners so soaked the valley with lachrymatory and gas shells, that it spelt death to travel without the head cloaked in a gas mask.

A new phase in support of Infantry attack was now conceived. Our ill-success may have been accounted for by the failure of advancing Infantry to keep sufficiently close behind the Artillery barrage line, a difficult task even for highly disciplined troops. This was due as much to the nature of the ground as to other obstacles which prevented realization of the ideal. Failure had always enabled hostile machine-guns to be brought into action against the Infantry after the shrapnel barrage had been lifted.

The Ridge just east of Bazentin commanded the Switch Line, up the slopes of which our attack must go. In order to cover the German defences I placed ten machine-guns in Savoy Trench, over which a magnificent view was obtained of the German line at a range of two thousand yards. For two days we carried ammunition to the battery position, as well as great quantities of water, for cooling purposes, stored in empty petrol tins. The policy governing the machine-gun barrage was greatly improved after this date. It is noteworthy that during the attack on the 24th, two hundred and fifty rounds short of one million were fired from these ten guns. At least four petrol tins of water, besides all the water bottles of the Company, and the urine tins from the neighbourhood, were emptied into the guns for cooling purposes. A continuous party was employed carrying ammunition. A belt filling machine was in action without a single check, and maintained by one man without relief for twelve hours. I offered a prize of five francs to the members of each gun team firing the greatest number of rounds, and this was secured by a gun team with the record of just over 120,000 rounds. The attack was a brilliant success, all objectives being secured within a very short time. Prisoners examined at Divisional and Corps Headquarters reported that the effect of the machine-gun barrage was annihilating. The strong counter-attacks, which as everywhere throughout the Somme battle, had been imme-

diately delivered were broken up while being concentrated east of the Flers Ridge and of High Wood.

The efficiency of the Vickers guns was astonishing, even to myself well experienced in their use ; and the success of the battle was a thrilling climax to the disillusion of the summer. I was perfectly happy then to die. When a fragment of shell split my steel helmet and ripped the scalp, causing blood to pour down into my eyes, while I was half stunned from the blow, with the touch of Nelson, I dictated my last farewells to the family and prepared for the long sleep. In fact, from exhaustion alone, I did sleep long, as did also the N.C.O's and gunners, and when I awoke with a splitting headache, and in ill-temper, I found my gunners sleeping at their posts. But there was an immense calm over the battlefield. And when morning came not a shell or rifle shot greeted the rise of the sun. Both sides were exhausted : Delville Wood remained wholly in our hands, but yet the enemy clung tenaciously to the north-east corner of High Wood.

It was during the later phases of the Somme battle that the phenomenon of the "Conscientious Objector" first made its appearance to the fighting troops. I had heard of those who by some twist of reason took refuge behind a conscience permitting unrestricted destruction upon the part of others. Impatient, I had not troubled to argue the matter. I cursed the "Conscientious Objectors" and went my way.

But one day as I trod the road of the Valley of Death towards Bazentin I came suddenly upon a scene of carnage. Nothing unfamiliar in that. A heavy shell had pitched in the midst of a party making good the road. The dead and shattered lay in my path, while the distracted halloed for stretcher bearers. I asked a stoical N.C.O. who they might be. He spat deliberately. "Only beastly Conchies." I learned further that men protesting conscientious objection to war had been conscripted and enlisted into companies engaged on special services such as sanitation and road-making behind the lines.

At the best conscientious objection was hair-splitting. At the worst it was the last resort of the coward, the man whose spiritual plane was so low that he funk'd hurt to the body.

The soldier is not an iconoclast. The citizen soldier cannot so be. As post-war history has now proven the professional soldier, even exalted, does not seek the shambles. Influences other than war, once battle has been entered upon, may lead him thither.

But a national war, a world war, shakes every human foundation, overthrows all known values.

Wherever I walked behind the battle lines on the Somme I was curious to discover relics of past British campaigns in Flanders. Uppermost in my mind was the heroic march of King Henry the Fifth, a hero since the days of my boyhood when I saw Louis Waller play the rôle in Shakespeare's play. The intrepid king severed himself from his base at Harfleur ; and with a thousand men-at-arms, and rather more than three thousand archers, went to beard the might of France, then assembling at Rouen.

Shakespeare, with his genius for incorporating the fact of history with romance, has preserved an incident of the occupation by British troops of Corbie. Incidentally, it is a tribute to the policy of King Henry that he did not molest the civilian inhabitants, but aided them in husbandry. Though even in those days some "scrounging" appears to have been permitted. I discovered, too, that the story of Henry's march down the Somme through Abbeville to Amiens, thence to Corbie, turning beside Ham to Peronne, through Doullens and to St. Pol, beside which lies the battlefield of Agincourt, came as a new incident of interest to British troops in Flanders. Most were entirely ignorant of this history. In the churchyard of Picquigny I discovered the graves of British soldiers who had died, either killed in combat, or strangled for some breach of discipline. And beside these had been laid other British soldiers, who in common cause with the people of Picardy now faced a common foe beyond Agincourt. The march of King Henry the Fifth, concluding with so astonishing a victory, took place between the 8th and 29th of October, 1415. Five hundred years later British soldiers who fell in Flanders were buried beside their forbears in arms.

The offence which Shakespeare records was that of a soldier who robbed the Corbie Cathedral poor box of its pence. Pistol is made to mourn the impending fate of his comrade Bardolph.

For he hath stol'n a pix and hanged must a'be,
A damned death . . .
. . . for pix of little price.

The man was hanged in Corbie in the shadow of the same cathedral which towered above the village of our frequent occupation.

The historian, Holinshed, in his chronicle of the campaign, wrote as follows :

"The Englishmen were brought into some distresse in this iornie, by reason of their vittels in maner spent, and no hope to get more, for the enimies had destroyed all the corne before they

came. Rest could they none take, for their enimies with alarmes did ever so infest them ; dailie it rained, and nightlie it freesed ; of fuell there was great scarsitie, of fluxes plentie ; monie enough, but wares for their relief to bestow it on had they none. Yet in this great necessitie the poore people of the countrie were not spoiled, nor aine thing taken of them without paiement, nor aine outrage or offense doone by the Englishmen, except one, which was that a soldier took a pix out of a church, for which he was apprehended, and the King not once remooved till the box was restored, and the offender strangled. The people of the countries thereabout, hearing of such zeal in him, to the maintenance of justice, ministered to his armie victuals and other necessities, although by open proclamation so to do they were prohibited."

Again in 1794 English and Austrian allied armies manœuvred against the French in Flanders and Picardy in the opening of the Napoleonic military era. A series of battles was fought in Picardy in May and June, centering especially on the River Sambre. Their object was always, as in the Great War, to defend Belgium and the coast from enemy occupation. The invaders appear to have shown similar characteristics to those of the twentieth century. Mr. Poppleton, writing from Flushing on 4th September, records : "All the Flamands from the age of 17 to 32 are forced to go for soldiers. At Bruges the French issued an order for 800 men to present themselves. Thirty only came, in consequence of which they rang a bell on the Grand Place, and the inhabitants thinking that it was some ordinance, quitted their houses to hear it, when they were surrounded by the French soldiers, and upwards of 1000 men secured, gentle and simple, who were all immediately set to work on the canals."

The retreat of the refugees was as general then as it was more than a century later.

Consul Harward, writing from Ostend on the 30th June, indeed it might have been of Bailleul in March 1918, records : "Should the enemy come they will find this town perfectly empty. Except my own, I do not think there are three houses in Ostend with a bed in them. So general a panic I never witnessed."

But it is enlightening to read the account of Lord Elgin after the successful Siege of Landrecies, where the "Old Contemptibles" fought in August 1914, written after an engagement on 1st May, 1794. "The magazines of the army are stored, and the provisions regularly given out to the troops, and good in

quality. Indeed, it is singular to observe in all the villages where we have been forward forage, etc., in plenty, and all the country cultivated as usual."

And so British soldiers fought their battles in the morning ; and in the evening helped the farmers of Picardy to stack their corn.

A truth which I have gleaned from reading many tales of the Great War is that some writers have been temperamentally unfitted for their task. They say it was a "soldier's war," implying that of privates, gunners, sappers, troopers. And so it was, up to a point. There were more of them. But nearly every action proves that it was a Brigadier's war, and in lesser degree that of his subordinate commanders. Battle decisions were made by brigadiers, and most often from personal observation they knew far more about the swayings on the ground than any private soldier. Certainly the judgment of the Brigadier surpassed that of the private in its tactical wisdom and in its sympathy. For be it remembered that the brigadiers of the Great War were regimental soldiers, with rare exceptions, promoted to this rank of temporary exaltation from the command of companies and battalions. In 1914 some were even subalterns. Primarily the training of the Brigadier was in the leadership of men. He was not called upon to stand of nights in the open trench, but he had done so. It was no part of his duty to lead the first wave of the assault, but he had so led. I think the verdict of history is that the War in its operations was primarily one of brigadiers and battery commanders. On the Somme certainly Rawlinson's tactical policy made it so.

And with notable exceptions the professional journalist who has written of war has striven too much for effect. Or perhaps he was so sensitive, and here his profession makes strong demands, that the eye of memory flies away to the unusual. He overlooked the football matches, and sees the dying in every ditch. The War for him is a crescendo of superlatives with one long round of horror piled on horror, sensation, crime, and vice. And so he has described it. Perhaps the mind of the journalist demands that its senses must be so keyed-up that the man himself can only just stand the stresses. If that is so then his stories certainly will be of that staccato kind, yelling fire and murder. He is eternally introspective, analysing his feelings towards this sensation and sound and sight. And then with all his literary skill he plots them down, and they pass for truth about the War. But most men were incapable of such self-analysis. They only felt vaguely and longed for some different indefinable state. In the front

lines, despite the appalling accident of shell-fire—the killing and wounding was sheer chance—the private was a free man, free to probe the sky or sit in the rapture of quiet reflection, far freer than in the huddle of tenement across London Bridge, beside the Clyde, or in some other crowded city. He was conscious of freedom of spirit; and the outward sign of that realization, strange as it may seem, was to be found in his utter lack of emotion in the presence of death. The dead he ignored almost with displayed contempt.

The highly strung, sensitive weaver of word pictures has not discovered this, nor has he solved the riddle of such fatalism. His puppets must weep, look with wistful eyes back to some wench of billets, endure endless explosions, and have filth as the *mise en scène*. Sensitive men suffered many things. The greater their courage. Each burst of shell-fire sent a shiver down their spines. Every burst of machine-gun fire made their spirits moan. But they steeled themselves beyond the imagination of the phlegmatic plough-boy clad in khaki, beyond the understanding of the miner carrying a soldier's pack.

The officer feared most, for by environment and education his senses were shocked the most. But there is little evidence that he displayed his funk. The soldier's war has suffered from its overemphasis. Most of those who would have it so were men of high scholarship serving in the ranks. And what they saw of war, and it was much, was viewed through magnifying-glasses, an outlandish, unfamiliar pestilence.

The Great War, like other wars, was one of leadership. Leaders and led. It was not won on the playing fields of Eton. We were delivered from defeat out of the best culture and tradition of the race, nurtured in the universities and schools.

The happiest days of my life were during the War. To the mind of those who have no experience of the conditions imposed by modern warfare this claim must appear preposterous. As a statement there seems to be an absence of logic in the light of events recorded. It is illogical, yet true. It is a claim made more and more frequently as the War years recede. In contemplation the thought, unuttered, deeply impresses the mind of the Warrior. The happiest days of my life.

In the front lines I was a free man. Far less shackled than are all men of the Western world by bonds of wages and of economic fear. For the first period of my life I was at one with Nature, dug once more into her very womb. Food and drink and warmth were provided. I possessed hours and hours in which, if I pleased,

I was utterly free to contemplate the universe around me, to engage in my own uninterrupted distractions. What glorious orchestration was the sound of birds chirruping at dawn in the shell-torn branches ! What a feast was a rasher of bacon after days of "bully" or iron rations ! How glowing a wash in hot water, or the plunge in a river, after weeks of mud or battle dust !

For thousands the stars across the great panoply of Heaven spread overhead were a new wonder. The dawn, for so many seldom seen before, although fraught with terror, arrested the senses by its wondrous gradations of colour and light. How sensuous the midday sleep, kissed by the hot sun, on the fire step of a trench. How astonishing was the sense of freedom even though Death sat beside me.

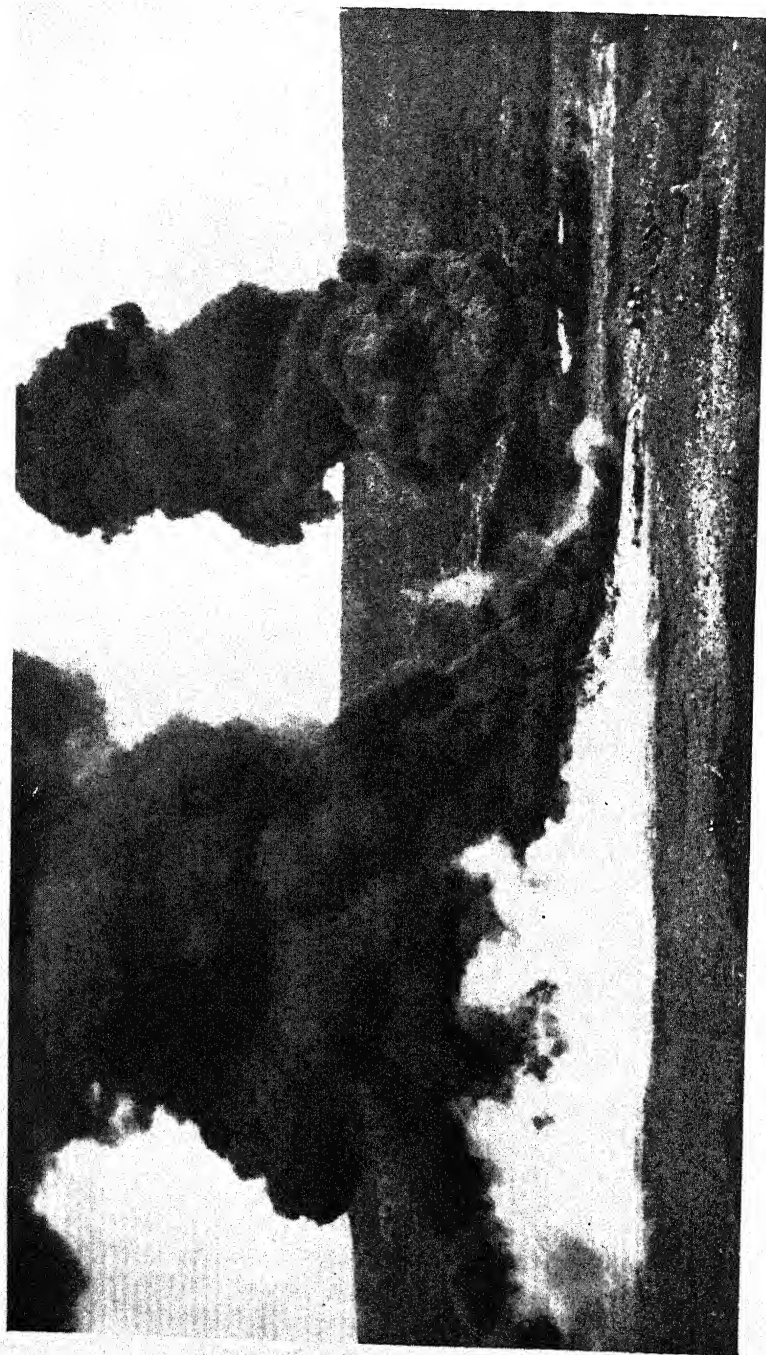
The remarkable paradox is therefore presented. Man, massed and marshalled as never before in all human history. Man, bound by a thousand disciplines of the military machine. Man, ordered in all the trivial circumstance of his being. Yet, in the front line, even at the moment, Zero Hour, when perhaps most nearly he often greeted Death, man was never so happy.

But then values had all changed for the man in the line. Be he butcher or baker, clerk or artisan, student, stockbroker, lawyer, what not, his concern in life was no longer to gain money or position. We enjoyed life itself. And the more fleeting did outward circumstance give to life's immediate appearance the greater the joy in its contemplation.

It must be extraordinarily difficult for the Warrior to explain, even to analyse for himself, what were the feelings which contributed this astonishing sense of individual freedom, and the happiness derived therefrom. He will not be believed. The conventional mind experienced only in artificially provided amusements, perhaps momentarily doped by religion, inheritance, or gain, even intoxicated by the passions, cannot even begin to appreciate the balsam, so absolute, so peaceful, of the Warrior's lonely vigil with himself. The few wild strawberries in the carnage of Mametz Wood suddenly met were imbued with far more sweetness than mountains swamped with cream. The city dweller who roams alone upon some upland beneath the stars, or gazes with uninterrupted view across woods and vales, and can thus walk or sit filled with rapture, some indefinable sensuous self-atonement with universal life, perhaps can experience how it is with Warriors who say, "The best days of my life were over there." Even the expression "over there," heard but rarely now, for the Warrior is a shy fellow and seldom carries his heart upon



GERMAN SOLDIERS IN ASSAULT FOLLOWING A SMOKE SCREEN



FLAMMENWERFER FROM A GERMAN TRENCH LINE
German soldiers are seen on right ready to follow up the attack by flame-throwers.

his sleeve, is filled with the joy of indefiniteness. "Over there," somewhere twixt Life and Death, between mortality and immortality.

And it was this feeling of near immortality which was for all men inexpressible happiness and freedom. Let it not be supposed that this joy sprang from some kind of religious ecstasy, or that men were enslaved by the Beatific Vision. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Most were possessed of but the vaguest sense of religion, whether organized or purely idealistic. The Sunday School played no part in this new-found freedom. Neither glory nor remorse worship, so often the stirrings of religious fervour in young men, were in any way concerned with this singular detachment. Man was happy in a new way, unutterably so, because new values determined habit-thought.

The scudding clouds in a summer sky, even seen through the dust of bombardment, meant far more in terms of contemplatory happiness than all the hopes of leave. For leave might never come. Even in that day, that very hour, perhaps at the next moment, some fierce explosion might take life away, hurling its mortal remains grotesquely against the paradises, its blood spattering the dugout steps, but the mind would still be with the scudding clouds.

Man was under the spell of a new freedom. There, that inexpressible happiness to which the Warrior wistfully looks back, and to which Warriors, understanding, will some day fade away.

The padres, champions of organized religion, sect bound, a few spiritually minded, understood not this mind-mood, from what source sprang its silences. Except with extraordinary rarity the padre dwelt somewhere at the back, his daily life occupied as censor, caterer, or philanthropic visitor. His experience was not ours. His mind was not attuned. He possessed no message for the fatalistic blasphemer. Nor could he understand the fatalism. The blasphemy shocked him and we knew it. "The blanketty blanks have forgotten the sugar. . . . Sorry, padre," heard daily up and down the line. Our fatalism the padre regarded as heathen or atheistic. It was neither. It was much closer to the Great Architect of the Universe than the bitter disillusion of his own mind, for man's happiness was because he had found himself at one with God, the Universe, bird song, and sighing wind, soft dews and warm suns, the tang of the wild strawberry, the music of the streams, twinkling stars and billowed clouds. If man died he remained to enjoy the magic of this newly discovered world. "And he didn't care a curse." The depths of Hell had been

plumbed. A marshalled, regimented Kingdom of souls was only another Salisbury Plain. For the Warriors, Heaven was a divine contemplation, inexpressible freedom.

And so as we trod trenches through whose reeking depths protruded hands or toes, or gazed across a rat-ridden "No Man's Land" strewn with fly-blown corpses, we might chant "Oh death where is thy sting, Oh grave thy victory?" and then sight a fresh green blade of grass and revel in the very beauty of the thing.

The padre is deserving of every man's sympathy. No body of men were ever entrusted with a more futile task. The padre could not obtain access to the Warrior's mind. The latter would listen to him dumbly, sometimes resentfully. Man's fatalism was his own secret, shared with those of common experience. But its divine exaltation was beyond the padre's knowledge. The parade service was an attempt under the cajolery of discipline to intrude into the domain of individual happiness. Almost universally it was loathed, a voluntary service poorly attended, except as a courtesy and by persuasion, or as part of a religious discipline.

The Warrior's happiness was sublime. "The happiest days in my life were over there."

For tens of thousands of men the great Somme battlefield over which war swayed forwards in 1916, back again in March 1918, and once more forward in September of the same year, will remain indelibly imprinted on their minds. The battlefield is barely 10 miles long and 7 miles wide and its highest point less than 500 feet above sea level. The main battlefield, lying between the trickling Ancre and the wide River Somme, somewhat resembles the Hog's Back in Surrey. The main ridge was through Martinpuich and High Wood, the redoubtable Flers Line, and small as is this topographical feature, it is the highest ground, indeed the only noticeable rise between the main plain of Western France and that of Flanders. Behind all lay the city of Amiens, festive although sandbagged, the glory of its Gothic Cathedral, architecturally so similar to our own Abbey of Westminster, always inviting wonder, and often prayer. Ruskin described its quaint wooden spire as "the pretty caprice of a village carpenter." The Godbert was a famous meeting-place, while even the *élite* among gourmets would dine with satisfaction at the Café de la Paix and the "Jimmy's Bar." The streets were always thronged with troops, mostly going or returning from leave. But there would be many others spending one day of relaxation from the front line, who had lorry-jumped or ridden in from the points of the fan of which Amiens was the pivot.

It was said that the city was honeycombed with spies, and that they were mostly women. It is possible. But the Assistant Provost Marshal of Amiens possessed a high reputation for efficiency. I doubt if spies eluded his vigilance for long. Unlike so many other A.P.M.'s, too, he exercised his authority with discretion. Rather than lead young men, to whose heads unaccustomed wine and freedom had gone, to detention and court-martial, he kept them privily, until sobered, and then dispatched them back to their units armed with the best possible of excuses. Indeed they deserved such pardon ; and the justice of the A.P.M. was tempered with much mercy.

The glorious hilarity of a party in Amiens stands out in the battlescape with the same high light as does the most bloody battle. This fact gives point to the argument that war-worn troops, removed from the spectacle of battle for a day or two, immediately recover their morale. While others, detained amid the dismal surroundings of shattered barns and festering holes, sank only deeper into depression. Amiens was, therefore, for many months the rallying point of an army's morale.

From Amiens the road in great bounds, rising and falling, ran straight to Fricourt, where for some prehistoric reason the peasants had made shirt buttons from oyster shells. A number of ill-kept villages with tumbling barns and evil-smelling middens lay in the valley running down towards the Somme. Yet Picardy was wealthy. Great granaries and mills so like the stone dove-cotes of Fife, and sugar refineries to serve the rich beet crop. How bitterly men fought for possession of these detached structures, fortified beyond belief. Thousands of men passed in and out from these rat-ridden, lousy habitations when moving up to the battlefield or when stumbling back after its days of agony. Morlancourt and Dernancourt, Mericourt, Meaulte, each damned ten thousand times daily, were such centres of concentration. Each slight landmark upon the downs shadowing the northern bank of the Somme became as familiar as the palm of the hand. The "Solitary Tree," high above Morlancourt, from which the squadrons of the Northumberland Hussars charged to death in Happy Valley. The stinking ruins of Mametz, recognizable immediately even from the closed shade of an ambulance wagon by its stench of German corpses pounded in the *Pappelweg* by the July bombardment. Along the bank of the Somme lay Bray, Suzanne with its great château, Curlu and Hem.

In the early weeks of the Somme battle these villages were occupied by French troops. But when our line was lengthened

to the south we took over the billeting quarters. The French erected great hangars, on the floor of one of which could be rested a whole brigade. I remember a stifling night in such a hangar when we relieved the French at Rancourt. As on the battlefield they had left their dead, heaps of them, unburied, so the interior of this hangar remains for me the great louse *caserne* of history, its floor a monstrous spittoon and latrine combined. Far behind the captured front, among the dead, I found also a French officer still wearing both the Order of the Legion d'Honneur and the Croix de Guerre.

If French troops were dirty, their animals were in worse plight. Even in the winter snow, picketed upon the bleak sides of the Maurepas Ravine, with hocks deep in mud, the coats of British transport animals glistened in the pale light. Both horses and mules throughout the campaign were wonderfully cared for. But the French transport, drawn by miserable screws, was flogged and harried along the roads, the harness cracked and green with verdigris, the withers of the animals oozing with blood. *C'est la guerre*. And so it was in rest billets. The crumbling farms of Picardy were familiar to us all until, when the Hun was at the gates of Amiens in March 1918, they were blown off the map, which was part of French good-fortune.

To the north of the road lay the city of Albert, through which the railway ran. A network of trenches surrounded it, and, although the inhabitants still clung to the ruins, doing a brisk trade with small shops, it was shelled almost without cessation. Facing the Place stood the Cathedral, a basilica, the famous gilded Virgin, hanging head downwards, poised miraculously at an acute angle hanging over the Place. A legend had it that if the Virgin was thrown from the tower the War would end. Like other virgins of Picardy, she fell; but the strife continued for many months.

The old front line had passed through Thiepval, Fricourt, and Curlu. By August 1916 a new area, with its landmarks became part of the Warrior's daily vade-mecum. The Valley of Death, not so recorded on any official map, ran from Fricourt, up past Mametz and Caterpillar Woods to Bazentin. Mametz Wood, like Delville Wood, was a thousand yards across and almost two thousand deep, a forest of trees and thick undergrowth. The bitter close-handed fighting in these woods, while shells shrieked through the leaves, and the trees themselves howled and sighed with pain as branches were torn and trunks shivered, was an inferno beyond Dante. Long after the battle had passed beyond

these woods the curious wanderer could always find some fresh horror to arrest his sanity. The villages for which we struggled—Pozières, Contalmaison, Montauban, Longueval, with Guillemont and Ginchy, and further east Martinpuich and Flers—were straddled on the ridge of the chalk downs. North, south, east, and west they lay, separated from one another by but a mile. What infinite distances those miles became as month after month we struggled to gain the brick-dust of a once village.

As men scanned the battlefield behind they said, and so expert agriculturists had also stated, that a hundred years must elapse before those fields again could be tilled. So torn and hopeless was the prospect with its craters interlacing one another, a problem beyond ploughing. So saturated was the soil with gas that upon numbers of square miles all vegetation had faded, not a blade of grass grew, not even a rank weed clung to the porous chalk. Nature, with far greater resources apparently than the human family, *homo sapiens*, within a few short years has restored prosperity to the farming community, while the belligerents who fought over those fields wallow in the depths of an economic abyss.

Farther east the rolling heights of the Flers Ridge are reached. From High Wood in the centre the steeples of Bapaume can be seen in the valley; and immediately below the Ridge, to the south of the town of Peronne, crowned by Mont St. Quentin and the valley in which lie Le Transloy and Les Bœufs, where our last efforts were strangled in November 1916. Overlooked by Mont St. Quentin on our side were the ruins of Rancourt and Bouchavesnes on the edge of the hated St. Pierre Vaast Copse, sheltering Saillissel.

It was in the quicksand quagmires of Rancourt that the Horse Guards, great six-foot men, their legs clad in leather gaiters, easily driven points for the torso, as their first experience dismounted as Infantry, sank waist and shoulder high in the mud, just where they stood. And there they remained to die. They were shelled by day, while it was sheer suicide to approach them. And by night parties carrying ropes and planks, bringing also rum and hot food, sweated in the freezing night to rescue them. Some, with dislocated limbs, almost dismembered, were dragged out after hours of toil. Dozens prayed that men would shoot them where they stood engulfed, before they were revitalized to face another day of transfixation and shell-fire.

Not a road, not a track, not a copse, not a tree, not a brick does not possess its scar of tragedy, nor yet its halo of heroism.

CHAPTER IX

ELEMENTS OF MORALE AND SURPRISE

SEPTEMBER 1916—MARCH 1917

War leadership—The critics of Staff direction—Possibilities of manœuvre on the Western Front—Clausewitz's teaching—The warrior's faith in victory—Tanks—Misuse of the element of surprise—Victory sunk in mud—Illustration of good tactical use of surprise—Results from the Somme battle—Factors producing high morale—Latitude of decision to local commanders.

DAYS or eternities like swelling waves
Surge on, and still we drudge in this dark maze ;
The bombs and coils and cans by strings of slaves
Are borne to serve the coming day of days ;
Pale sleep in slimy cellars scarce allays
With its brief blank the burden. Look, we lose ;
The sky is gone, the lightless drenching haze
Of rainstorm chills the bone ; earth, air are foes,
The black fiend leaps brick-red as life's last picture goes.¹

BY the end of August it was plain that the Battle of the Somme must be accounted a failure for British arms. Our losses were out of all proportion to those of the enemy while the actual gain of ground, some miles of devastation, served no future tactical purpose, and proved only inconvenient to the troops.² Yet, it appeared, Sir Douglas Haig must retrieve the disaster of his hopes of a "break-through," and so with increasing tenacity we continued the attack.

The Divisions available were already many times exhausted, and the reserves too few to hack through to victory.

With candour and sobriety this matter of the conduct of the Higher Command and the attitude of the Staff towards troops, and that of soldiers towards command, must be discussed. Having regard to their high responsibility for morale, there is, indeed, sufficient to call for condemnation in that attitude, recorded in the diaries and personal reminiscences of several of the higher leaders.

¹ From "Preparations for Victory," by Edmund Blunden.

² See comparative tables, in chapter "The Blood Test," *World Crisis*, by the Rt. Hon. Winston S. Churchill.

Winston Churchill,¹ in recording the appointment of Sir Henry Wilson as Chief-of-Staff, writes : "The War Cabinet found for the first time an expert adviser of superior intellect, who could explain lucidly and forcefully the whole situation and give reasons for the adoption or rejection of any course. Such gifts are, whether rightly or wrongly, the objects of habitual distrust in England."

Wilson succeeded Sir William Robertson on the 11th February, 1918. Winston Churchill is a critic, himself trained in the profession of arms, a man of the highest intellect, great experience in public affairs, expert in analysis, capable of amazing speed in decision, who candidly reports that until just nine months prior to the Armistice there had been available to the War Cabinet "no expert adviser of superior intellect."

The reader of British war literature will find suggestions, both by implication and directly, of incompetence and of lack of sympathy in nearly every publication written by junior officers and those who served in the ranks. Courageous and competent men commanding Divisions and Brigades, as well as many junior staff officers, suffered from the Warrior's well-founded distrust in some of their colleagues, including those in the most exalted positions. A Regular Army, expanded to unprecedented proportions, insisted that in the Citizen Army professional mediocrity must first be served. The percentage of genius in the professional ranks cannot be in any higher ratio than it is in the mass, though it may be more easily discovered. The German military authority, Clausewitz, possessed military genius. His fault, like that of others of superior intellect, was to assume too often that his students would be able immediately to understand and interpret propositions which, to his own mind, were so simple. Not least among the British Staffs, perhaps, has there been too ready an assumption to dismiss without further discussion Napoleon's dictum that "moral force is to physical as three to one." The phenomenon of moral force, the problem of human nature both individually and in the mass, its variations in the nations and races of the earth, in town dwellers and in country men, in circumstances of victory or defeat, is of even far greater importance than considerations affecting the number of guns which can be marshalled at any given point, or than any other desiderata of space, time, and material.

The explosive denials of those with vested reputations are no reasonable reply to the accusations which have been made. Honest criticism will serve as a lesson for the future.

¹ *World Crisis*, by the Rt. Hon. Winston S. Churchill.

Wickham Steed,¹ a critic of great eminence, Editor of *The Times* during the period of Northcliffe's proprietorship, has even suggested that "most British soldiers, including Sir Douglas Haig and his principal staff officers—who had learned their skill in military thought from the great German teacher, Clausewitz—believed strongly that the only way to beat the enemy was to go for the point where he was strongest, and to hammer away on the Western Front until they had smashed him. . . ." Then Mr. Lloyd George, or somebody for him, read Clausewitz, and found out where the mistake was. Clausewitz was writing about a war of movement in which armies could march and manœuvre freely. But he had also a chapter on sieges, and in that chapter he said that the right way was to go for the weakest, not the strongest, point of the enemy. "This trench warfare," said Mr. Lloyd George, in a famous talk with Sir Douglas Haig, "is a siege, and, in the name of Clausewitz, we have got to go for the enemy's weakest point."

If the argument of this critic can be sustained, it is a revelation of bankruptcy in both knowledge and imagination in the Higher Command. It is a ridiculous picture, that of the Commander-in-Chief and his generals armed with the gospels of Clausewitz punctuating a declaration to the Prime Minister upon immediate strategy by some apt phrase taken as an apologia from Clausewitz. It seems incredible. It is more reasonable to believe that Haig, like Foch, sincerely believed in the break-through. He was equally convinced that momentum could again be given to the stagnated lines.

We may wonder if Lloyd George and Clemenceau, had they agreed among themselves, would have permitted Haig to employ a strategy of manœuvre involving perhaps Flanders and Artois. It might not have been inconvenient to tempt the Germans to assault between Armentières and Vimy on a twenty-five mile front. It was not impossible. We may wonder whether uninstructed public opinion would have tolerated great losses of territory, even the town of Béthune. But here was an area of manœuvre suitable both strategically and tactically. The C.-in-C., having lured the Boche, would have kept hold upon the line of a purposed retirement, as the finger and thumb pull back the gut of a catapult. Could a Hindenburg and a Ludendorff have restrained their hunger for victory, or that of their subordinates? We may doubt it. When the Germans had thus been "led up the garden," the C.-in-C. might have flown two

¹ *The Observer*, January 10, 1932. From a review by H. Wickham Steed.

hundred aeroplanes, complete with two machine-gun crews apiece, twenty miles behind the Boche attack. And there they would have landed. A trifling risk of two hundred machines and about a thousand men. Even partial success would have proved a surprise devastating to morale, hideously inconvenient to supplies, reserves, all order. Simultaneously, bang would have gone the catapult as a counter-attack, but only a feint to draw the reserves farther into the net ; while the real, concealed, offensive was launched simultaneously from the flanks at Armentières and from Vimy Ridge. The truth is that both generals and politicians fear a public opinion, which cannot be preadvised of strategic fact.

It is a far easier task to produce a successful strategic plan in an enemy country than in operations upon the soil of one's own Fatherland, or that of one's Allies. Consider the success of Tannenberg, of the German offensive in Roumania, of Allenby in Palestine. But the civilian element, the Nation, the Government, the War Cabinet, even soldiers of a high professional standard and understanding, expect every movement upon the mother soil to go forward. The Cabinet might comprehend a policy involving the partial withdrawal of the line, but it would be a rare body of politicians which would not be fearful of public misunderstanding, and obstruct in anticipation of criticism. To this extent the C.-in-C's hands were tied.

Haig's manœuvre plans may, therefore, have been swayed by political considerations, though this does not appear in an authoritative account. Certainly, on the other hand, he was overborne by the War Cabinet, especially following the misadventure of Passchendaele. But politicians, those with understanding of military affairs, with the notable exception of Winston Churchill, who fathered the Tanks, possessed no spleen for bold strokes, and were ever unwilling to support enterprising projects possessed of the element of surprise. The Clausewitz conception of siege tactics can scarcely be said to have applied to the Western Front at any time.

From some accounts the reader would be inclined to believe that the work of Clausewitz is a kind of text manual of the type of *Infantry Training*, giving a number of solutions for military puzzles. Clausewitz's great work—*Vom Kriege*—more than any other thesis during the past century, has influenced European policy. It is a profoundly scientific study of war as a subject of knowledge, and as a manifestation of life through a nation's will. It is a treatise based on deep thought and a masterly comparative method, undertaken by a man of high intellectual distinction.

Vom Kriege demonstrates the intimate connection between the truth on defined principles and their application in tested facts. The substance of von Clausewitz's teaching is that war is a continuation of State policy by methods appropriate to its nature and in the achievement of the ends of the State. Among the disciples of the author of *Vom Kriege* were the great von Moltke, and the man who with Frederick the Great and Goethe made Germany—Bismarck. With inflexible logic von Clausewitz marshals, analyses, and sums up Prussian thought from Frederick to Scharnhorst ; and then, taking the inspiration of his audacious thought from the latter, he discovers in Napoleon's policy and campaigns the most convincing proof of the doctrines which he expounded. Von Clausewitz was the founder of the German General Staff. Equally *Vom Kriege* is the classic upon which has been founded the war policy of every modern State. Statecraft, strategy, all war operations are inevitably linked together. The one dissolves into the other. War, Mirabeau had insisted, was Prussia's national industry ; he might well have added, its workshop practice founded to compete with that of France. Von Clausewitz's thesis, which had so profoundly influenced Bismarck, the masterful founder of modern Germany, is as important to the study of the statesman as it is to the soldier. A curt dismissal of *Vom Kriege*, even a failure to recognize the far-reaching influences of its teaching, displays a disregard for those factors which governed Germany's *real politik* no less than German strategy.

It is no charge against the British General Staff that it was steeped in von Clausewitz's teachings. Political causes, no less than the undue optimism of the Commander-in-Chief, were responsible for dissipating the scarcely trained new British armies in the Somme adventure. And after its failure, what man can now tell of the influences which impelled Haig as a final fling to jettison the wonder weapon of surprise ? Yet Haig, schooled in *Vom Kriege*, had faith in the possibility of the "break-through." "Even foolhardiness, that is not to be despised."

What is more important is that the warriors themselves believed that the enemy lines could be rolled back. The method of attainment was always, in fact, a subject for lively speculation. What soldiers did not believe was that it would, or could, be accomplished by massed infantry attacks against machine-guns defended by barbed wire, and without the best circumstance of weather, and without adequate men and artillery.

There are endless illustrations, some recorded herein, for the

foundation of such belief. Given different *tactical* methods it seems demonstrated that the military *strategy* was superior to that of the statesmen.

But a new and mysterious weapon was now available—"the Tank."¹ Despite the protests of the inventors, and of those who formed the nucleus of the tank personnel: in spite of the paucity in numbers, only fifty in all were available, and the fact that the Prime Minister endeavoured to dissuade him from their use, the Commander-in-Chief was determined. The tank had been intended for use over reasonably sound ground. Essentially it was to be the weapon of surprise.

The tank it was, nevertheless, determined should bolster up the faded fortunes of the Somme, if not the reputation of the Higher Command, whose optimistic hopes, reverberating in a crescendo of ecstatic journalism, had been drowned in blood. No one seems to have realized that tanks, given sufficient numbers, are an alternative weapon to the artillery preparatory bombardment. The use of tanks following prolonged artillery preparation, despite repeated failures, yet the unquestioned, well-established custom of the Somme battles, deprived this great achievement of military engineering of its most dominant asset, surprise.

The tanks had been designed and constructed, the crews trained, all the experimental work carried out, behind a rich camouflage of planned perjury, and barbed wire. No secret of war was ever better kept. Yet the potency of this new weapon of surprise, capable also of reintroducing armed movement to the stagnation of the Western Front, was to be dissipated as a last fling in the hopelessness of the Somme. This handful of tanks was received by staffs, troops, and war correspondents alike much as a new beauty chorus makes its first *début*. Everywhere they were fêted as they crawled and sprawled over the incredibly evil tracks leading to the battle positions.

Reserved for the spring, when in great numbers they might have stormed the defences of the Hindenburg Line, the story of the Great War might be differently written.

As it was, with weather already breaking, supporting exhausted troops, following in the wake of the customary bombardment which warned the German defenders safe in their dugouts of the coming attack, the supreme invention in modern military science was thrown away to placate the critics.

The possibilities of its use, if its value had been properly

¹ *History of the Tank Corps*, by Major Clough Williams-Ellis, M.C., and A. Williams-Ellis.

appraised, is demonstrated from contemporary accounts of the tank's first action.

"It 'leant' against a wall until it fell and then crawled over the fallen débris.

"It went irresistibly through High Wood, the trees smashing like matchwood before it."

"It went up to machine-gun emplacements 'crushed the gun under its ribs,' and passed on, spitting death at the demoralized Germans."

"It 'stamped' down a dugout as though it were a wasps' nest."

"It crashed through broken barns and houses, 'straddled' a dugout and fired enfilading shots down German trenches."

It is, of course, true that the tank did come as a surprise to the enemy. The secret had been well guarded. The surprise was of the invention itself. As an element in the winning of victory there was no surprise. It took fourteen months in which to discover that the new "Excalibur" forged in England was a weapon of surprise to be used as such as an alternative, perhaps the only effective one, to the artillery barrage. Surprise. Why, the crudest boxer in the ring knows its value, seeks for it!

Yet on the 15th September, despite the failure to appreciate their proper rôle, tanks, heading the infantry assault, crashed at last through High Wood and carried the Flers Line. A flippant young airman, stunting above the wonder of the scene, sent back the famous message:

"A tank is walking up the High Street of Flers with the British Army cheering behind."

The message was gall and wormwood to the hearts of the inventors whose brains had fashioned the tank. Mechanical cavalry, demoralising to the enemy, fortresses of reliance for British infantry, thrown upon the scrap-heap of the Somme, beside the litter of derelict transport and the sordid profusion of dead men and animals.

The weapon of surprise had been offered up as a burnt sacrifice to faded fortune.

As in the commencement of the Somme battle we were not called upon to participate in the first stroke, so while the tanks waddled out to their first battle, we sat viewing the scene of the Somme's first disaster. A very quiet spot now, Gommecourt Wood, seen across a narrow ravine in which rotting equipment and the bleached bones of the dead yet marked the sudden



BRITISH TANK IN ACTION

A *



A GUARDIAN OF THE HINDENBURG LINE
German sentry protected by steel armour.

*

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failure of British arms. So still was Gommecourt that I could ride almost to the trenches. The villagers of Pomera and Bien-villers, a mile or so behind the lines, still held their civilian inhabitants. And I, feeling secure amid the summer seclusion of leafy trees, occupied a second-story bedroom, well furnished, in a considerable house with good stabling.

Happy days. A quiet line without a casualty. Blessed rest. A little drill to check slovenly ways : running and physical culture games to blow gas and gaspers out of the lungs. Bathing in the Somme Canal near Picquigny. Throwing a fly in a quiet backwater, or merely watching a float. Sketching. Riding across the stubble. Cricket matches. Kicking footballs about. Quick holidays in Paris. Beanos in Amiens or Abbeville. Happy days.

No one who participated in the seemingly futile operations of October, November, and December 1916, which concluded the great Somme offensive on the Western Front, can reflect upon them without a shudder.

The countryside became a quagmire ; roads disappeared beneath a surface of oozing mud ; trenches were waterlogged ; a pitiless rain descended, while no part of the line held a more hideous spectacle than that which followed the stinking ruins of the hamlets of Les Bœufs, Rancourt, and Bouchavesnes. The burden of movement, let alone of offensive action, rendered the task of shifting ammunition, stores, rations, and the ever-increasing wounded almost impossible. And so British troops, huddled in insecurity by day, waited for darkness during which at least succour could be brought to the wounded, without fear of a sniper's bullet, and an effort with ropes and stimulants could be made to free men, half drowned and frozen, held fast in the mud.

Then suddenly a fierce frost descended upon the battlefield. The mud caked like coke ; and though it was as impracticable as before to construct trenches or earthworks, rapid movement became immediately possible. The General Staff reappeared to take stock of a situation hitherto known only by hearsay, and vaguely reported by distracted Brigade and Battalion Commanders. Intelligence officers came up to seek confirmation of rumours and to examine the situation for themselves. Orders were issued for a raid for the purpose of obtaining identifications of the troops opposed to our line before Mount St. Quentin and Bouchavesnes. We knew all about those raids. They were of two types. The "raid and stay," which involved artillery

preparation for the purpose of destroying the barbed wire entanglements, and then a slow march usually under cover of darkness, but sometimes also under that of gas or smoke, by an infantry weighed down by loads of bombs, ammunition, machine-guns, and all the paraphernalia of specialist warfare ; who, if they arrived safely in the enemy's trench would find it occupied by one or two machine-gun posts, and would then settle down to be shelled to extinction by an enemy's artillery which could gauge the trench line to a fraction of an inch and knew the entrance to each dugout to a fine point.

The other type of raid was that of "raid and away." This diversion consisted in rushing the enemy line by any ruse of surprise which happened to be the stunt of the moment, and if the vigilance of the enemy was distracted by a livelier interest in breakfast, the mail, or some other small excitement to break the monotony, then the raid was usually highly successful ; and it was possible to bring back quite a collection of reluctant Germans to keep the intelligence officers occupied with improving their knowledge of the German language, and in compiling copious reports for the edification of regimental officers. These reports, it may be remembered, passed under the name of "Comic Cuts." If, on the other hand, the German sentries happened to be gazing through a camouflaged loophole upon the dull vista of soggy sandbags, empty tins, and tangled wire, presented by the British trench system, and noted the sudden and unusual appearance of the first and subsequent steel helmets in the foreground of this wearisome landscape, the raid came to a sudden and tragic end upon its own parapet.

The type of raid chosen for this new adventure was that of "raid and away." The Worcestershires were selected for the raid, and they were relieved for four days in order to rehearse for this new comedy. The weather prophets foretold that the frost would hold good for at least two weeks, and the Battalion was withdrawn to the quiet of Suzanne, to a camp constructed by the French, which during the night of relief was hidden beneath a blanket of snow. Great flakes fell all night and still descended in the morning when the Battalion awoke for its first day of intensive rehearsal.

But as the C.O. watched the silhouettes of men disporting themselves upon the whiteness of the snow, it suddenly dawned upon him that an operation of the type in which his Battalion was to be engaged—"raid and away"—wherein the element of surprise was the first and practically the only essential to success,

could not possibly achieve its result, unless either the snow disappeared completely, and here the weather pundits were against him, or some new stunt could be developed by the inventive genius of the Staff.

The C.O. favoured postponement, and went off to Brigade Headquarters with the object of expounding the new difficulties presented by snowfall. He and I were as thick as thieves. I went with him. He shuffled through the deepening snow, his hands plunged into his pockets, shoulders stooping, chin thrust forward, an attitude characteristic when his mind was far away, when a new solution of the problem presented itself to his mind.

Obviously the black silhouettes crawling across the snow would be instantly spotted by a watchful enemy and the raid would perish in its genesis. But if the attacking troops could be clothed in white, like Bedouins in the desert, then they would be able to approach the line camouflaged under white like the ground itself. The brilliance of the notion caused the C.O. to chuckle mightily. He slapped his thighs with delight, and bounded through the snow with a light step to Brigade Headquarters. He entered the château, warmed with a dozen stoves, red-hot with blazing timber, and pushed open the room occupied by the Staff Captain. Here the C.O. found the Regimental Quartermaster, equipped with that mastery which many years of Eastern guile had planted deep beneath the mental hide of a rhinoceros, "making"—I can think of no better word, and those who knew the Quartermaster would certainly have used it—two stoves where one grew before. The Staff Captain was certainly making a gallant fight with forms and formula, but the Quartermaster was winning, and "winning." The C.O. was a little loath to protract the battle, or to divert the Warriors to the problem which obsessed his mind, but the matter was pressing and the ways of "Q" are tortuous and long.

"Just the very two men I was hunting," he exclaimed, as he kicked the door to behind him. "You're going to give the Q.M. his new playthings, aren't you, Nixon? I want that point settled quickly. Just think of all the thawing he'll need if he's frozen," he laughed, waving a hand towards the bulging middle which, with each intake of breath, fought for mastery with the Sam Brown belt holding the massive frame to something of military shape.

"All right," said the Staff Captain, with some reluctance. "There'll be a hell of a row, I expect, but we'll wangle it somehow . . . and now, Colonel, what can I do for you this morning?"

"Have you any white sheets in the shop?" asked the C.O. dramatically.

The Quartermaster so forgot himself as to interject, "What the 'ell do you want sheets for? Beg pardon, sir. I'd like to tuck the boys up in bed myself, but white sheets!" he gurgled.

"Oh, shut up," said the C.O., laughing. "This is a serious business. Now where can the Brigade get white sheets?"

"I've never had an indent before. I expect you can get 'em all right. They must be part of an army's equipment. Hospital supplies, I expect, but it'll be the devil of a business to get an indent passed through Division, Corps, and Army Headquarters. I'll turn up the *pro forma* and see what's quoted. But perhaps we could short circuit the inquiry by asking the A.D.M.S. He's lecturing the General on trench feet in the next room."

"Good," said the C.O. "We'll have a conference. I will reveal the plot. Come on, let's go and see the General."

He led the way out, and we four, after knocking, entered a room in which were seated the Brigadier, with his Brigade Major and the Chief Medical Officer to the Division.

The General looked up in surprise. The C.O. was not to be balked—the matter was pressing. "Good morning, General," he said. "I've a most important matter to discuss with you, sir. I heard that Colonel O'Brien was with you, and his co-operation and advice will be of the greatest assistance." The A.D.M.S. beamed with delight. "May I put the whole matter to you right away, sir?"

"Are you concerned with this, Hutchison?"

"Yes, sir," I replied.

"I hope," said the General, smiling, recollecting my escapade in which the profession of medicine was involved,¹ "that it's nothing infectious. My disinfectant cannot be applied to battalions." We all laughed heartily.

"No, sir," I cut in. "It's quite simple. We want some white sheets, about two hundred of them, and we thought the A.D.M.S. could advise us how to get them."

The Brigadier appeared irritated. "Don't be frivolous," he said. "There's a time and place for a joke."

"Sorry, sir. I started at the wrong end. I think the Worcestershires had better explain."

He then pointed out the difficulty with which the sudden fall of snow had confronted us, and expounded the solution which had come to mind. The General was interested. Colonel

O'Brien was deep in meditation. "That's a great idea," said the latter. "I make no claim to tactical knowledge, but I think I can improve on it. I've a notion that bales of white night-dresses were imported upon the instruction of someone, very wise and discreet, at the War Office. I heard it as a joke some six months ago when I was doing duty at the Base. If it's sheets that are wanted I will obtain them myself, if you, General, will make the necessary request to the Divisional Commander. And if it's made-up garments, why sure!" he drawled in his Irish brogue, "if the night-dresses still exist, I'll bring a load back with me in the ambulance."

It was all settled and agreed. Colonel O'Brien was to go immediately to the Base, armed with full authority to bring back "dresses, night, linen, white, nurses, for the use of," or failing these a sufficient supply of white sheeting with which to complete the camouflage of two companies of Infantry.

Hugging our secret we returned to the camp to supervise the training of troops. After dinner that evening the C.O. telephoned to Brigade Headquarters to inquire if there was any news, but nothing further had been heard of Colonel O'Brien. I messed with the Worcestershires. A Company commander who was to lead the raid entered Battalion Headquarters, kicking the snow from his boots. "I've just been trying experiments outside, sir. With this snow on the ground you can see a single man easily at two hundred yards, and when you get a platoon out you simply couldn't miss 'em. It's going to make a bit of a muck of the raid, I think, sir. Of course what I have observed is quite obvious to the men. Don't you think, sir, it would be advisable to postpone the raid?"

"Sit down and have a drink, Hodson," said the C.O. "I'm entirely sympathetic with you, and I've already had a talk with Brigade Headquarters and I'm expecting a message to-night on the subject."

"That's good, sir. It would be suicide to try it under present conditions."

Some minutes later a message was received from Brigade Headquarters. The Staff Captain presented his compliments, and desired to report that Colonel O'Brien had been entirely successful, and would the C.O. send a limber forthwith to take delivery of the goods.

"Hodson," said the C.O., "have your men ready for parade, inside the hut in half an hour's time, and send a limber to the Brigade Office. You," he said, addressing the Quartermaster and myself, "come along with me."

We arrived at headquarters to find Colonel O'Brien exposing a white linen night-dress, taken from a bale, to the curious and admiring eyes of the junior members of the Staff. It was quite a work of art, pleated and frilled with mother-of-pearl buttons.

"Now," said the General, as he entered, "before we go any farther we had better try out this brain wave. Hutchison, Nixon, and the Quartermaster can put on the clothes while we will observe the result."

Nixon and I were quickly encased, not so the Quartermaster whose bulk failed to make an entry, so the Brigade Major acted as a substitute. Then we all went out into the snow, and our night-dress party, disappearing behind a clump of trees, made an attack upon the château across the field as prearranged. The experiment was completely successful, we three stalking the little group beside the château gateway to within a few yards without detection.

"All right," commented the Brigadier. "I've had it in mind to ask Division to postpone the raid, until after a thaw; but if you're game to do it this way you'll have all my best wishes and support."

"Yes, sir, but I'd like first to get the confidence of my Company officers and the lads in the scheme: and I'll try out the idea to-night. The men will be on parade now."

"I'm coming with you to see the fun," said the Brigadier, laughing: and accompanied by the limber we all went down the road to the Worcestershire camp. The C.O. gave orders for all officers and men to be within their huts and then entered that of Hodson's company. In the presence of the Brigadier the C.O. outlined the plan which he proposed, to the immense amusement, not easily suppressed, of the men. The Quartermaster then opened the bale, and each man was issued with one night-dress, into which he was ordered to enter. I doubt if during the period of the War greater shouts of laughter were heard than those which greeted this ludicrous sight. The remarks made are quite unprintable. The C.O. permitted a full measure of hilarity in order to allow it to wear itself at least to partial exhaustion. It was arranged that Hodson should lead this company, accompanied by my four machine-gun teams participating, to the training ground and attack the hedgerow bounding the camp, behind which would be the other company detailed for the raid in defence.

A quarter of an hour later the C.O. disposed the other company behind the hedge, as in a trench, and posted sentries to look

out. The snowflakes still fell slowly, but the night was bright. We peered across the snowfield. We neither saw nor heard anything. Then suddenly there was a loud cry, and the faces of a hundred men rose from the whiteness of the snow some twenty yards from the hedge and stormed it in mock warfare. The effect of such shock tactics both upon the defence and the attack was completely convincing. The plan was further improved by arranging that the men's faces, bare legs, and steel helmets should be whitewashed before the raid. Then during the remaining days the details of the raid, escorts for prisoners, bombing parties, machine-gun escort, and flank support were carefully worked out and rehearsed.

On the evening of the third day the Worcestershires, each man with a lady's night-dress in his knapsack, relieved the Battalion in the line. The snowfall had almost ceased, leaving the ground covered to a depth of six or eight inches, soft and silent to the tread, white as a linen sheet. A pale sun had appeared by day, and the crescent of a moon by night was just discernible through the light snow.

On the fourth evening, after whitewashing helmets, faces, hands, rifles, legs, and boots, four hundred men in two waves stealthily rose above the parapet. The night was as quiet as a cemetery. Not a gun spoke on either side. Not a rifle bullet pinged through the still air. The first company, Hodson's, went on steadily, then, as it approached the German lines, sank upon its knees, and crawled forward in line noiselessly through the deep snow towards the enemy trench. The machine-gun supports lay out to the flanks; the second company crept through the wire entanglements without a sound, and jumped lightly and swiftly into the trench. The Germans, men of the 3rd Guard Grenadier Regiment, were completely surprised and overwhelmed at once. Only one rifle shot rang out. Within three minutes prisoners began to come back with their escorts. Two machine-guns were carried as trophies. The bombing parties made hay of the dugouts, throwing loads of bombs into their deepest recesses. More than one party of men made two excursions across "No Man's Land," bringing in prisoners and loot. Then, at a signal, the two companies withdrew, showing a net result of twenty-seven prisoners, including two officers, no one knows how many enemy dead in the depths of the dugouts, two machine-guns, and a magnificent collection of trench maps, trinkets, and souvenirs, at the cost of one man slightly wounded. Our Artillery placed a heavy protective barrage upon the enemy's front and support

lines ; and many minutes after the Worcestershires were safely back in the depths of their dugouts, a hysterical enemy Artillery commenced heavily to shell our lines with no result other than a disturbance of the snow.

The Worcestershires with the aid of night-dresses were one up on the Boche.

I have heard that Boer farmers in South Africa coined " Devils in skirts " as the soubriquet for kilted Highlanders, but I don't yet know how the Guard Grenadiers have described the attack by Worcestershires rigged out in " dresses, night, linen, white, nurses, for the use of." Anyhow, the raid produced good copy for *Comic Cuts*, though the method of its creation has remained a secret.

" Peace on earth : goodwill towards men." Christmas found us in this most unpleasant place. Corpses reminded me of sacrifice, the great Philosophy of which was born on this day. It was an evil Christmas. The Germans spared us not. So different from that of 1914, when those occupying the opposing trenches had sung to one another, and exchanged the paltry presents of the trenches, buttons and cap badges, cigarettes and cigars.

We shuffled farther south, taking over from the French a part of the line which included the island of Ommiecourt in mid-stream, but connected with the northern bank by a causeway made of planks. The river froze. So thick was the ice that shells of the smaller calibre, with a flat trajectory, failed to burst on impact, and ricocheted over the surface like a child's stone thrown for ducks-and-drakes on an unruffled pond. During a test shoot by a battery of forty-eight machine-guns, also, I noted this same phenomenon. The battery, observed from Mont St. Quentin, came under fire. The shells were flung all around my gun positions, but skimmed from the ice, bounding to the hill-side behind, against whose face they exploded.

Ommiecourt provided opportunities for enterprise, as did the ice. Opposite the island, where the river turned almost at right-angles, lay the German lines, wholly safe from any frontal attack, defended by the river. I thought of naval operations. A punt was secured, its sides hung with steel helmets, providing armour-plating down to the waterline, machine-guns mounted fore and aft. Until the river was frozen over, at night this gun-boat stole forth from its sanctuary in the reeds behind the island, and harassed the German lines with fire ; but its progress was too slow for safety.

When inches of ice provided a sure footing I decided to make a reconnaissance of the German lines across the ice, preparatory to raiding them. In order to ensure against mishap I was secured with a telephone wire and was accompanied by a private soldier. This man, unfortunately for himself, decided to fall through a shell-hole in the ice and was salvaged half drowned. I went a good long way quite happily ; until a flare was fired from the German line, when I decided it was prudent to sit down, especially since a machine-gun began fitfully to whip the surface of the ice with bullets. Finding, however, that there was no longer a continued pull on the cable my good men at the other end determined that I must have become a casualty, jerked the cable taut, and I found myself slithering across the ice back home again. No sooner had I succeeded in getting on my feet than another jerk came upon the hawser and I tobogganed across the ice, on my way being immersed in water in the various shell-holes which had pitted the surface of the ice.

Thus home : and further weeks of freezing before Peronne, until relieved for blessed rest at beloved Corbie.

It would be difficult to estimate the hardship inflicted upon troops by the continued battles of the Somme. The flower of the New Army had been cut down on the first day. Of the 60,000 casualties on the 1st July, 20,000 were dead. Nothing had been gained as the result of the battle, except perhaps the relief of pressure upon the French before Verdun and a weakening of German morale. By comparison, however, it may be doubted whether German depression was deeper than that of the British Divisions, although reinforced, which survived the ordeal. The Germans, fully prepared for the offensive, had uttered their challenge from the front-line trenches. The losses inflicted on the assault far exceeded those of the defence. The line had nowhere been seriously broken, and there remained as the spoils of war only a barren, shell-torn, dismal field of slaughter.

One may well reflect upon those causes in war which deprive an army of its morale.

In attack an Army Commander can achieve little with tired troops. In defence they may not be reliable. This was discovered, usually too late, during the course of the War, notably perhaps in the attack upon the Flers Line and beyond in October 1916, and at Passchendaele in the late autumn of 1917.

The factors which contribute to an army's exhaustion under conditions of modern warfare are of exceptional interest. By contrast, it may be noted in the history of war, that, for example,

either forced marches upon an empty stomach, or inferior arms and defences have produced inertia. Tired troops have possessed no élan in the attack, or if ill-equipped have soon lost heart. But the Great War, wherein movement paradoxically was its least notable feature, and in which attrition had become the governing factor, loss of morale was the result of stagnation itself. A proper appreciation of the psychology of troops subjected to the attrition strategy will nevertheless retain in soldiers a high fighting spirit.

Except in respect of the tragic adventure of the hungry reserves at Loos, there was no notable incident of exhaustion being produced through hard marching without adequate rationing. The retreat of the British from Mons is untypical of modern conditions and does not enter into the present discussion. Nor, with the exception of the first few weeks of war, was the British Army pitted against an enemy armed with superior weapons.

On the contrary, the British from its munition factories rapidly developed a superiority in armament. Even when the German Armies were freed from the Russian Front, though due to the profligacy of Passchendaele we were greatly outnumbered in Divisions, we were not "outgunned," and by that date, March 1918, in the eleventh hour of time, also, machine-gun fire and its organized control had been immeasurably increased. It is doubtful if Haig's personal order to his troops to "stand with their backs to the wall" could have fulfilled itself as it did without this reorganization in small-arms fire power. In defence the controlled fire of numbers of machine-guns disposed among Infantry is a moral factor of the greatest magnitude. It may be observed, also, that British air supremacy, continually growing and almost daily to be observed by the fighting troops, was similarly an additional moral factor of high value.

A very careful study of men exposed to the conditions of static warfare is, therefore, essential to an understanding of the character of the British soldier in France and Flanders. It may be stated at once that apparently trivial ancillary services, overlapping the field of voluntary welfare work, grew to be of supreme importance. I do not believe that sufficient attention has been paid to this fact, although such services formed often for long periods the sole recreative interest of the fighting Divisions. I refer to Divisional Concert Parties, Race Meetings, Horse Shows, Football Matches, Boxing Tournaments, and suchlike.

In any future national war no Division should be permitted to go overseas without its Recreation Officer chosen as an expert

in industrial welfare organization, and in showmanship. Ours is an age of the screen theatre, the radio, and the gramophone, available to all classes, and occupying much of the nation's leisure.

Cutting men off from their recreations is obviously deleterious to their moral strength.

During the Great War organized Entertainment flourished rather upon its own initiative than due to the ordination of the General Staff.

The value of military Bands cannot, also, be overestimated. Nevertheless, during the War such bands as remained were seldom available for the moral rehabilitation of Divisions and Brigades after great privation, but were largely retained as the playthings of Corps headquarters. The expert musicians of famous Regimental Bands universally became Stretcher Bearers in pursuit of an administrative system determined by the block-house and skirmishing tactics of South Africa or the Indian frontier. It is a matter for comment that such regulations were not changed in the earlier days of the War. Bands should have been reformed for Brigade use, available always to the Battalions in rest.

Where Battalion Bands continued in being this was due to the self-sacrifice of officers who put their hands in their pockets to supply instruments and music, or to the private resources of a Regimental Canteen fund.

Nevertheless, important to the sustenance of morale as were and are entertainment, recreation, and martial music, there is another factor which invites more serious attention. However inconvenient to Army and Corps staffs, the fighting troops in the Divisional plan of tactical organization should not be permitted to remain for a long period in a devastated area. The brevity of this time should always be a matter of immediate concern. Safety of defences must always be the first consideration. This implies that the Brigade units and formations in rest away from the immediate fighting zone, being the reserve, must be bivouacked or entrenched in close proximity to the defensive line. During the period in reserve, therefore, the troops remain amid all the depression of a shattered landscape, and divorced from natural human associations.

Often, as during the comparatively quiet months which followed the Battle of the Somme, from November 1916 till March 1917, or from November 1917 till the end of February 1918 in the Ypres Salient, or again on the front held by the 5th Army

preceding the German offensive in March 1918, Divisions were retained for many weeks within the close confines of a devastated area.

No failures in attack, no losses, no exposure to vile weather conditions, nothing so tended to lower morale as a long imprisonment on the battlefield.

It may perhaps be urged with some force that the failure of the 5th Army was in large measure due to this cause. The troops were tired. All the evidence goes to support this contention, even that of the Army Commander. Their weariness was war weariness, born of boredom and lack of compensation.

Shop-fronts stocked with goods, refreshment-bars, streets, curtained windows, the green patches of lawns, but especially a population engaged in its daily trivialities light the eye of the Warrior with gladness, fill his heart with joy. If only he lounges lazily watching a byplay which he scarcely understands, the subconscious mind re-echoes the home refrain. At once the Warrior is at one with his surroundings. The terrors, the anxieties, the discomforts of that other life are cast aside like a dirty cloak. And be it noted no compulsion is longer needed to personal cleanliness. Self-pride reasserts itself. A day or two in touch with civilization, with a population, will raise the spirits of the most dejected army, and, granted good discipline and belief in its cause, will refurnish it with the highest military virtues.

It was wisely said by God that man cannot live alone. Warriors in all ages have discovered compensations. The Carthaginians, the Normans, the warlike Dorians, Scythians, Tartars, and Celts, among whom there was an absence of any strong moral feeling, cultivated, and even idealized as a military virtue, an emotionally developed sense of comradeship, on the grounds that it counteracted the longing for the softening feminine influences of the home. History gives the student to understand that in those armies, among the warriors, long separated from the influence of women, such comradeship was fostered as promoting heroism and heightening *esprit de corps*. In the passionate lament of David for Jonathan there is provided a picture of intimate friendship, passing the love of women, between comrades in arms among the warlike races of the East. Such comradeship is common enough, and apparently self-sufficient in the mercenary armies of history, and perhaps, also, in the regular and conscript armies of the modern world.

But in the British Army, expanded upon a national citizen

basis, such conceptions were repugnant and almost unknown. The natural desire of man for association with women and the home was very real. War did not change the culture and customs of the British people. The majority who formed the armies in France had been uprooted from the placid peace of English life, wherein the most striking feature is the family tradition.

Weakening of military morale was more quickly produced by long segregation from accustomed influences than by any other cause. In colloquial phraseology, a "binge" in any of the towns behind the lines more quickly promoted recovery from the tragedies of battle, exposure, and depression than any other artificially provided stimulus to this end. Freedom, relaxation, conversation with those not engaged in the business of war, a jest across the bar counter and flirtations in the farmyard, were of infinitely higher value than the "blood on the bayonet" and the "blood on the bullet" orations by athletes from the Base. Uplift rhetoric in terms of military offensiveness produced little moral result whatever. Impassioned speeches by generals of the High Command also served no useful purpose. For example, during May 1917 it would have been of far greater value to send back the storm troops of the 100th Brigade to Doullens for a "binge" of individual fashioning than to keep them in rest amid the shattered ruins of Hamelincourt. And then to bring to them a Corps Commander to provide oratorical pictures of the pleasant vales and cottages of Worcestershire, the shady glens and purple hill-sides of the Highlands, and the red-roofed villages of Surrey. The speech served only to promote a longing for home and its trivial delights, which the streets and houses of Doullens could well have reproduced. Rather than inspiring zeal such propaganda served to weaken morale.

It may here appropriately be observed that the accounts of debauchery, chiefly to be found in works of fiction with a war basis, and in the mostly anonymous confessions which pose in literature as reporting, are grossly exaggerated, and the incidents recorded are highly improbable, if not entirely lacking in truth.

Without loss of tactical advantage, and without unduly straining the supply services, Divisional reliefs could certainly have been better arranged to meet the real need. It may be observed that the intermediary of the Corps between the Army Command, whose front and area seldom changed in four years, and the Division, the largest tactical unit, was the real obstacle.

In this connection the futile continuation of assaults in the Somme battle from the Flers Ridge towards the quagmire at

Les Bœufs and Le Transloy suggest that the multiplication of staffs and intermediaries places the Army Commander out of touch with the troops under his command. It was in this instance not until Lord Cavan's exceptional and spirited reply, resulting from a Brigadier's personal protest, made direct to the Commander-in-Chief that the appalling, purposeless waste in human material ceased.

No Army Commander, not the Commander-in-Chief himself with all the resources of the State behind him, can hope for success on the battlefield unless his mind is frequently attuned to the anxieties, fears, hopes, ideals of the men who go over the top at dawn, or who resist attack at the muzzle-point and with the bayonet and bomb. It would seem, therefore, in dealing with citizen armies, especially with one of volunteers, that the need is a closer touch between the Commander and the fighting men, entrusted both with the fighting of battles and incidentally with the reputation of the Commander.

The Brigade Commander, perhaps that of the Division, but essentially the former, knows, if he is fitted to command a platoon, the strength and capacity of his command. He has to his fingertips its morale and fighting quality, its training and experience. He understands the private soldier as well as he appreciates the foibles of the Commanding Officer. He is in daily touch with the terrain and the front occupied. He appreciates and has knowledge of detail which may not even be shown upon the Corps Commander's map and aerial photographs.

The Brigadier may, probably will, as in the Great War, command townsmen and countrymen, English county, London, Scottish, or Welch troops. In determining each particular task from week to week, and for each operation, he weighs the scales between the units under his command. The Brigadier, unlike most Battalion Commanders, has no "family" prejudices, no blind parental enthusiasms. He is detached, yet intimate. Upon all occasions on which vital decisions of assault or defence must be made, therefore, the views of Brigadiers should be directly canvassed by Army Commanders.

I suggest this as one of the supreme lessons of the Great War. Two instances may serve to illustrate this point.

The continued attacks east of the Flers Line opposite Les Bœufs, with their appalling waste of life without tactical advantage, were brought to a halt by the personal representations and protests of Lord Cavan commanding the 14th Corps and by Brigadier-General Baird commanding the 100th Brigade.

Again it was Brigadier-General Baird who on the 27th September, 1918, registered his protest against the task set to his Brigade. As the result of a personal reconnaissance of ground he maintained that the attack could not be expected to achieve success unless assisted by tanks, or by considerably increased Artillery, or unless the enemy's machine-guns were masked by a heavy smoke screen. These aids to the Infantry assault not being available, he requested to be allowed to deploy his Brigade in "No Man's Land," and instead of making a frontal assault upon formidable positions, by manœuvre to take these from a flank. The Brigadier was refused this latitude of decision and initiative. The attack failed, and the Brigade was sacrificed. At Gallipoli on the 21st August, 1915, by contrast, the representations of the Commander of the 88th Brigade were upheld; and the attack which he had been ordered to carry out was cancelled as the result of a personal report upon ground and the capacity of the troops under his command.

CHAPTER X

PUNISHMENTS AND REWARDS

APRIL-AUGUST 1917

Battle of Arras—Attack on the Hindenburg Line—Success attends surprise—A Horse Show and a Race Meeting—Topography of the Arras battlefield—The Belgian coast—Nieuport—Night bombing—Mustard gas.

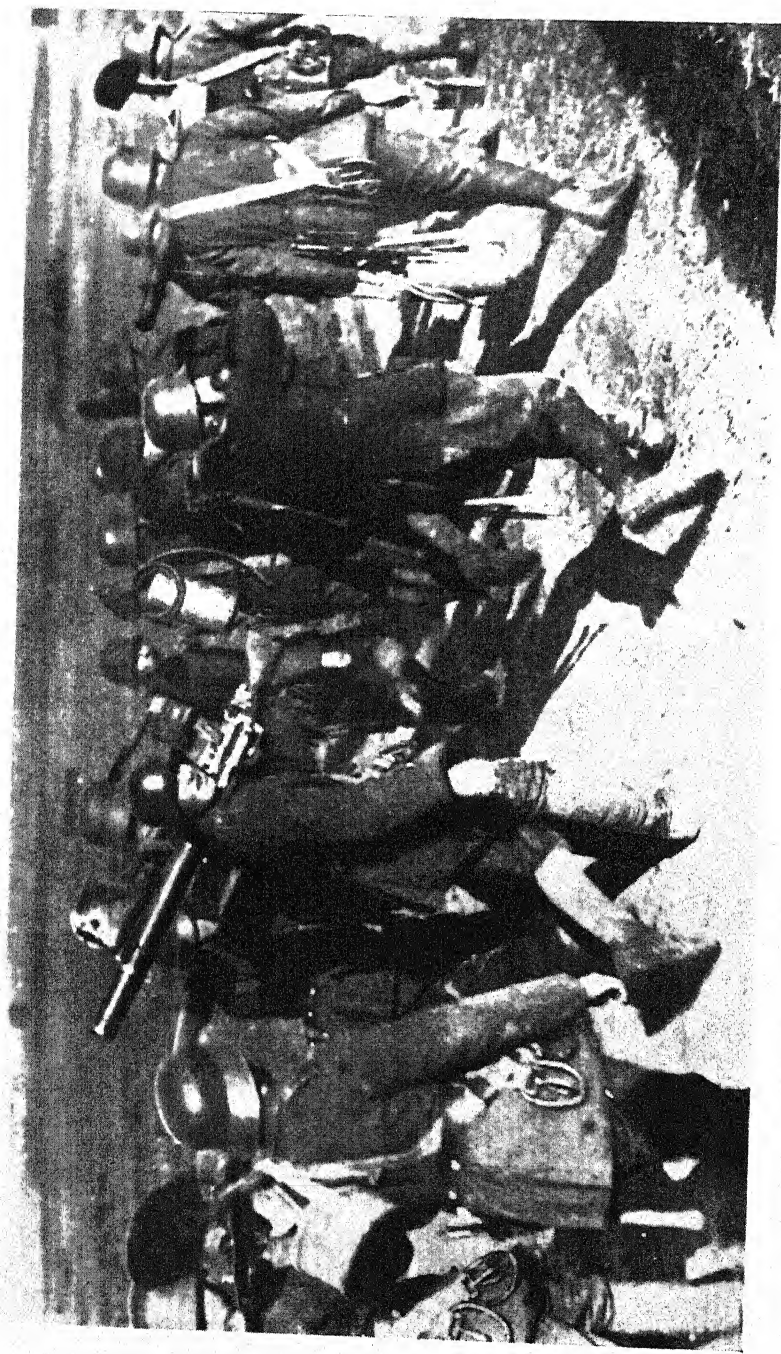
If after death, love, comes a waking,
And in their camp so dark and still
The men of dust hear bugles breaking
Their halt upon the hill,

To me the slow and silver pealing
That then the last high trumpet pours,
Shall softer than the dawn come stealing,
For, with its call, comes yours !¹

WE were wise men who went to the Battle of Arras. The Somme with its high hopes and disappointments was behind us. Many of the wounded had returned, and those of us who had survived were rich in experience. Wise ourselves in many things we expected a new wisdom in the Higher Command. We had learned how to follow a "creeping," in truth a "lifting," barrage closely : how to consolidate quickly an enemy position won, even with its wings in the air : where and how to expect resistance and counter attack. We knew the noise of shell fire, could discriminate from sound where each variety would find its mark. This was "shell sense," an asset of incalculable value to Infantry. We understood the limitations of cannon fire, the merits of the machine-gun barrage, the possibilities of tanks.

All things in modern war, its pains and penalties, its ardours and endurances, its few rewards, we had suffered. We knew, too, the futility of the Infantry assault against positions defended by uncut wire and flanked by machine-guns. We had experienced the tragedy of the frontal assault alone.

¹ From "I Heard a Soldier," by Herbert Trench.



GERMAN STORM TROOPS WITH LIGHT MACHINE GUNS GOING FORWARD TO ACTION

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OBLIQUE AIR PHOTOGRAPH OF THE HINDENBURG LINE SOUTH-WEST OF BULLECOURT

Arrows showing the formidable wire entanglements.
(Compare with illustrations opposite page 186.)

Neuve Chapelle and Loos, each in turn had taught their lessons. The Somme, as a further ghastly warning, dispensed the latest message in the record of its dead and wounded.

Renewed confidence inspired us. Spring, with all the magic of its beauty, was everywhere. The air was fresh and invigorating. The sun shone every day.

In anticipation of the offensive we were held in Corbie. I shall always remember this little country town with peculiar affection. There was not much of the town, and its walls mostly had been splashed high with mud from endless streams of lorries thundering over the *pavé* of its streets. The dust of the Somme battles still lay thick wherever winter rains had failed to wash the masonry. The town with its neat streets clung around the Cathedral, superb Gothic architecture, and beneath the shadow of the Cathedral stood the Café Alexandre, blue shuttered, and on the opposite side of the street the Café de la Poste, happy meeting-places. Hugging the main road which turned sharply before the Cathedral was the Place, faced by the pretentious little Mairie. Plane trees, and seats beneath their shade, gave to the Place its continental distinction.

In the evening the elders would sit and gossip, while the little children gambolled at their grandparents' feet. Often enough they were waved aside, or some elder man would hobble quickly to snatch a child from beneath the feet of drummers. For each evening "Retreat" was bravely played upon the Place by such Battalions as might be resting in Corbie. While billeted in the town I always went to the Place for "Retreat," and marvelled at men whom I had seen so recently bearing stretchers on the battlefield, now proudly rolling a tattoo on great tenor- and side-drums swinging by the drummers' peculiar gait. Drummers with heads thrown back, eyes bright, drum-sticks whittling a rhythmic pattern in the air, the crash of the big drum, the swelling roll of side-drums, the gay piping of the fifes; and ahead, with martial pride and infinite glorious swagger, the Drum Major. The 1st Queen's vied with the 2nd Worcestershires in pipe-clay and ceremony. It made my heart beat faster to watch them. And each third night the pipes of the Glasgow Highlanders would bid for first place as the popular favourites. With the inhabitants, at least, I think the 9th H.L.I. were preferred. Swinging kilt and sporran are superb ornamental assets, always a good handicap to popular esteem.

But for me, the disciplined precision of the drums and fifes, showing so high an efficiency, won the first claim to esteem

and affection, and this despite an inherent allegiance to the pipes. Immense crowds of soldiery from the streets, shops, and estaminets of Corbie would gather in the Place at sundown. The applause even in these days of popular Band favourites would have heartened Jack Payne.

Never was the Division in better spirit. With my company officers and N.C.O's, who came at my invitation to the sanctuary of my billet for the evening, I celebrated the last night in Corbie before the move forward. We consumed quantities of red champagne. God knows its name and vintage. It was glorious stuff, flowing red, sparkling, poppling from magnums. Little fat Davidson, my youngest subaltern, who had survived High Wood and still was with me, was as "tight as an owl." The parlour was cleared, and the landlady with friends joined us in a dance. We sang ribald songs until gaspers parched the throat and red bubbles made the tongue wag uncertainly.

And then in the morning early, with some sly digs, and beneath the censorious eyes of good lads who, too, had "celebrated," and had watched through the windows of my billet, with good discipline we marched forward. Sweat streamed on that spring morning. But the sounds of drums and of songs were yet in our ears and the first victory of Vimy already gave a lightness to the step.

The "break-through" at last. The Boche was on the run. Drums would beat in Berlin!

It was our misfortune, as on the Somme, that we did not take part in the success with which the battle opened. From north to south the offensive had gone well. On the 9th April the Canadian Corps captured the Vimy Ridge; the 17th Corps had taken all its objectives and formed a defensive flank to the north; the 6th Corps had secured equal success south of the River Scarpe. Only the 7th Corps, incurring heavy casualties, was held up by the Hindenburg Line.

As we marched jauntily towards the battle-zone, the tale was of victory. We halted beside Hamelincourt. Its masonry and timbers were unlike those of Longueval or Gillemont, for their structures, though battered, still provided the semblance of habitations. Hamelincourt and Boiry Becquerelle, St. Ledger and Croisilles, gave the impression of quick-moving warfare, of hurried evacuations, and of pursuit. On the day upon which we left our bivouacs for the relief of the 21st Division in the line, General Allenby, commanding the 3rd Army, published an order stating: "We are in pursuit of a beaten enemy." Evacuated

villages were impressive of the truth of this Order of the Day. But Sir Thomas Snow, commanding the 7th Corps, for whose reinforcement we were destined, remarked: "Attacks by Corps formations against machine-guns in position are 'rot.'" It did not seem, therefore, that those directing the battle from their maps were as familiar with the obstacles to pursuit as was a General more closely in touch with topography and troops. The latter proposed, therefore, that the penetration of the Hindenburg Line, a more formidable obstacle than we had previously encountered, should be accomplished by strong patrols and raids.

The ground over which we were destined to attack presented some features very like those before High Wood. Croisilles, like Bazentin, was raised on an eminence and overlooked the ridge on which was dug the Hindenburg Line. Viewed from the cemetery in Croisilles, in a family vault in which I had installed my own headquarters, the Hindenburg Line seemed impregnable. Avenues of stout wire, many yards deep, lay before the line. A series of traversed deep communication trenches connected the support line with the front. Those who had succeeded in gaining a foothold at great cost in the German front defences informed me that beneath the lines lay long galleries, electric lighted, connecting also the front with the rear, in which great numbers of troops could be kept safely during a bombardment.

A valley, the dry watercourse of the Sensée rivulet, as at High Wood, lay on the forward side of the ridge, the ground ascending steeply to the Hindenburg Line. On the left was a ridge corresponding with Martinpuich, and on the right the ground rose to Bullecourt. But in the centre of our attack front the Hindenburg Line dipped sharply to admit the passage of the Sensée River, and in the gap stood the pink and white brickwork of Fontaine les Croisilles. By daylight the Sensée Valley, covered by machine-guns from the north, was well-nigh impassable. At night it was drenched with gas and thick shell fire.

For ten days between the 12th and 22nd of April we pushed forward posts towards the Hindenburg Line. We made some local assaults, also, on the Line itself, in one of which we were successful, as a preliminary, in obtaining a foothold as the pivot on which would swing the main attack.

Great heart was given to the main attack from a *communiqué* distributed before the hour of assault, announcing that to date the 3rd Army had captured one hundred guns and a hundred thousand prisoners. We concentrated for the attack with

difficulty, for the Germans had carried out a deliberate plan of devastation. Farm-houses and villages had been gutted by explosives ; and orchards, trees, and village crucifixes had been cut down at their roots.

On the 23rd of April, the 98th Brigade, established in the Hindenburg Line, was ordered to deliver a bombing attack southwards and to effect a junction with the 100th Brigade, which simultaneously would deliver a frontal assault against the Hindenburg Line on the other side of the Sensée Valley. The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were to attack across the open on the left, while the 1st Middlesex bore down the trench system. At "zero hour," 4.45 a.m., the big barriers, which we had erected to flank our hold in the front and support lines, were destroyed by mines. The enemy, making full use of its covered approaches, fought with fury. One company of Highlanders, surrounded on all sides, perished almost to a man. But 240 prisoners were taken ; and the 4th Suffolks, assisted by two tanks, secured a junction with the 100th Brigade astride the Sensée River, a difficult operation.

The value of the machine-gun barrage had been learned. During the night before the attack, protected only by a small escort of the 2nd Worcestershires, some twenty wagons, with forty mules, had driven down the Sensée Valley into "No Man's Land," depositing twelve guns in battery positions, with many thousands of rounds of ammunition. The position was within three hundred yards of the German line. The battery was disposed in a fold of ground close under the Hindenburg Line, with a superb view up the Sensée Valley to the east of Fontaine, and covering the Hindenburg Line itself, with sight into the trenches to the north.

At dawn the 100th Brigade advanced through a bombardment of exceptional ferocity. The defenders filled the air with stick bombs. By 10 a.m., the position of the Queen's, who with light casualties had obtained a lodging in the line, was desperate. Communication of all kinds with the Brigade centre had been destroyed, while a light mist hanging in the valley prevented sight. By the use of the tunnel system it was an easy matter for the enemy to supply their forward troops with bombs and grenades, but it seemed an impossible task for any body of men to bring more ammunition or reserves to the support of the Queen's in their plight. Nevertheless, despite the heaviest losses, with great gallantry the 16th King's Royal Rifle Corps repeatedly made their way carrying bombs to the beleaguered men of Surrey.

Had a tank been available, its services would have been invaluable at this moment.

A chalk quarry lay under the Hindenburg Line, and here I had my command post, within thirty yards of the machine-gun battery, hailing lead at the two-storied concrete machine-gun nests and sweeping the German supports. In this quarry, too, had been herded some two hundred prisoners, taken during the first success of the assault. At this hour of desperation I sent my groom, tucked on the saddle of my charger, through the tempest of the Sensée Valley, with a message reporting the position to the Brigade. At the same time I called for a volunteer to drive a limber loaded with bombs up the valley and into the Hindenburg Line. That story is one of the most heroic in all the history of mules and drivers.¹ The body of the driver was riddled with shot. The mule itself, with its load, toppled into the besieged trench. But in that instant the Germans made a determined counter-attack, driving the remaining elements of the Queen's and Rifles from the Hindenburg Line. As the men came back the well-posted enemy machine-guns picked them off like rabbits at a battue, and scarcely a man returned unwounded. After this first assault, the 1st Queen's, that Battalion which with such pride had strutted the streets of Corbie, numbered less than one hundred men.

During the earlier stages of the attack we had captured some two hundred prisoners, who had been hurried to the rear. Due to the severe bombardment of the Sensée Valley, the only way of communication, the prisoners were kept for safety in a chalk quarry with steep sides providing excellent cover. This quarry lay within a hundred yards of the Hindenburg Line, and being so close to the German defences was also practically immune from shell-fire. The successful enemy counter-attack, which drove the remainder of our troops from the line, presented an urgent problem as to the disposal of the prisoners. They were acutely aware of our defeat, and few men remained to guard them. Moreover, bitter anger and resentment was aroused in the guards who had witnessed their own comrades, even wounded men, being shot down as they retired from their lost objective in the Hindenburg Line. A show of unrest on the part of the prisoners, and the manifest pleasure which they displayed in our defeat, clearly witnessed from the quarry, led to the massacre of many of them, as the most truculent were about to take up arms from the material which lay to hand. A great number of bombs were hurled into the quarry among them.

¹ *Footslogger*, page 190 seq.

In the subsequent successful attack which was carried out, we discovered that men, left behind wounded from the earlier assault in the Hindenburg Line, had been bayoneted where they lay.

Prisoners of war were often a grave embarrassment to the attack. There were several instances—one other within my own personal knowledge, namely the murder of the Commander of the 4th King's at Meteren in April 1915 by a prisoner—of men who had surrendered during one phase of battle re-arming themselves, turning on their guards, and attacking their victors from the rear. There is, also, the peril to which both prisoners and their escorts are exposed, if prisoners are to be sent back immediately far to the rear following capture, for the enemy's barrage invariably is concentrated behind the hand-to-hand fighting, with the object of preventing reserves reinforcing those who have gained an entry into his own lines. For an escort to go back through this barrage zone from the safer position of a captured enemy trench is a proceeding involving considerable risk. N.C.O's with escorts detailed for this duty were loath to undertake it. On one occasion, during the minor operations to the east of High Wood in August 1916, I witnessed a Highland sergeant in charge of three prisoners, following a shallow communication trench under heavy shell fire, hesitate, then dispatch his prisoners with a rifle and return to the front line.

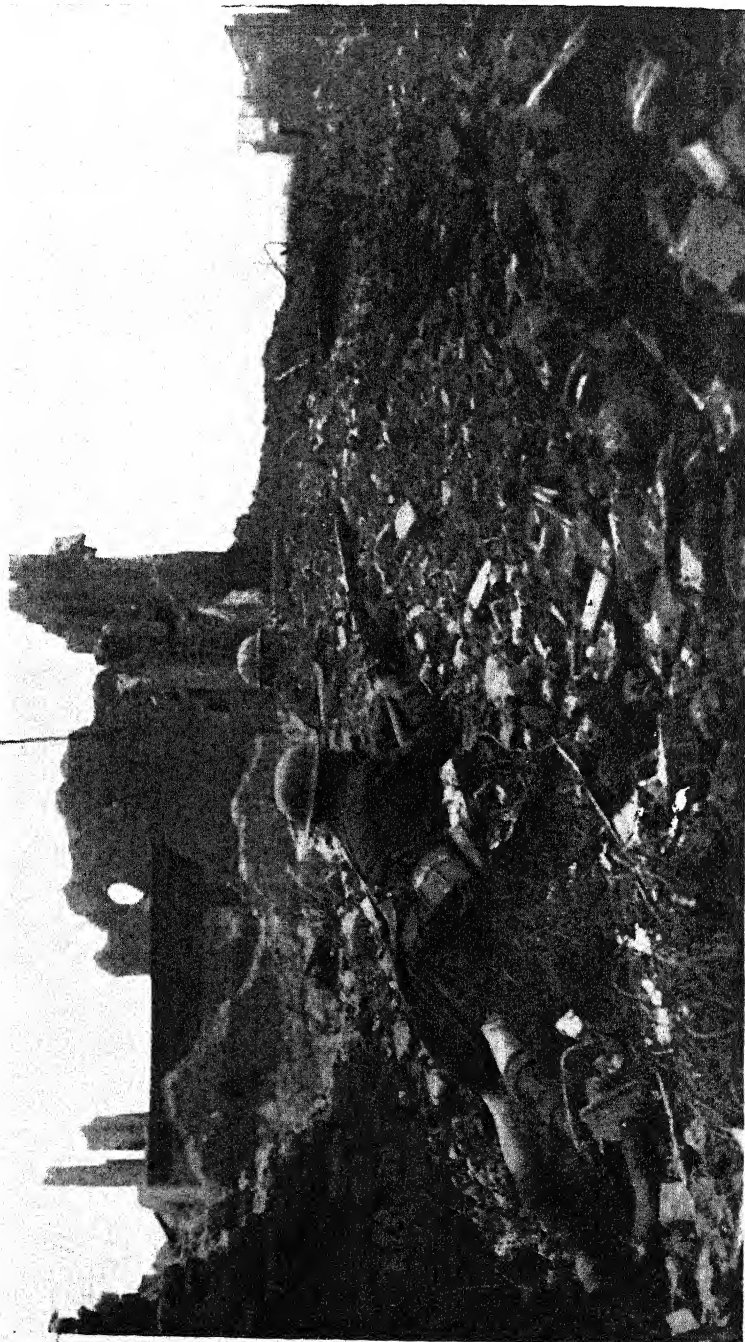
Prisoners of war in certain phases of battle, unless secured by handcuffs, or provided with adequate escorts which are seldom available, may be a grave embarrassment ; and must be recognized as such.

It was now plain that no attack south of the Sensée could be successful until the high ground to its north had been captured. That same evening the officer commanding the Liverpools, in his shirt sleeves, led a further attack. The Argylls, and some of the Middlesex, still clung to their position in the rear of the Boche, and the Liverpools forced the enemy to retire at dawn, re-securing this vital tactical point of the Hindenburg Line, commanding the valley, east of Fontaine.

The Division had been so harried, and had suffered such severe losses, that it was withdrawn to a quiet sector in order to refit and receive new drafts. By this date the true story of the Somme battle was well known. We entered quiet trenches opposite Gommecourt Wood. Across a deep ravine, perhaps 120 yards wide, separating a Somme objective of the 1st July from our own line, the twittering of birds could be heard in the



PREPARING TO ADVANCE
Lewis-gun team with gas masks.



FIGHTING THROUGH A VILLAGE

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trees, and seldom was a shot fired from either side. In the valley between the lines hundreds of corpses, to which clung rotting clothing and equipment, still lay to remind men of the futility of the frontal attack against wired trenches defended by machine-guns.

Some of the inhabitants had returned to Bienvillers; and greatly daring, although the village lay but a mile behind the line, I accepted the hospitality of a great four-poster bed in a second story, and slept, a monarch in survey of the line, my head resting easily upon down-stuffed pillows.

The lesson of the Somme was not enough, nor that of Arras. Back on the 16th of May we went to renew the assault on precisely the same position at which it had failed before, and against which in frontal assaults Division after Division had been fruitlessly flung. The "retreating enemy" refused to retreat: "rot" was setting into the pursuit.

I dug myself into the railway embankment beside St. Ledger. Beneath the strength of the permanent way it was as safe a dugout resting-place as ever I have found. But even so tragedy befell me, for during the night, boisterous with shelling, a giant explosive directly hit the roof of the dugout in which my company runners were sleeping. Dawn found the wreckage. With dreadful speed, with pick and shovel, we dug. Two lads had been crushed to death. A further man, from the evidence of his torn hands and finger-nails, had fought desperately for release from suffocation. Two still seemed possessed of life, and we exerted ourselves to restore them. But though life flickered for a moment the shock seemed to have been too great; and five good men perished.

The attack was ordered for the 20th May on a wide front, both Allenby's 3rd and Gough's 5th Army being engaged. The 98th Brigade was entrusted with a task almost identical with that which it had attempted on the 23rd of April, while the 100th Brigade, on the right, assigned a wider front than before, was expected to repeat its frontal assault.

For the carrying out of the tactical operation the will of an exceptionally forceful Brigadier was permitted to prevail. The scheme for the attack was planned by him in minute detail.

There would be no preliminary bombardment. No sign would be given to the enemy of the forthcoming manœuvre. In place of the usual assault at dawn following a prolonged bombardment, we were to come swiftly up to the Hindenburg Line at the Boche breakfast hour, shortly after 9 a.m., at which time prisoners

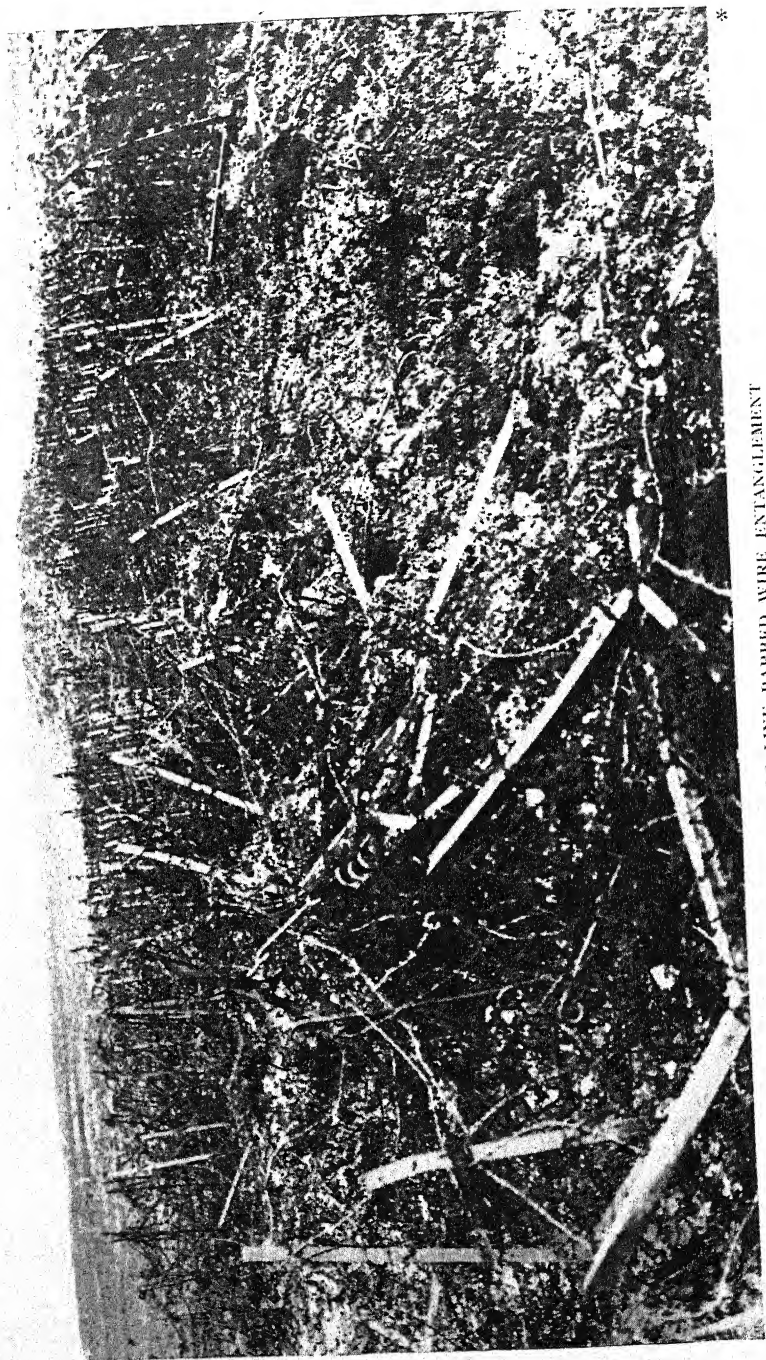
had informed us that the troops stood down, and the German sentries would be unsuspecting. In order to provide some special interest to preoccupy the eyes and minds of those occupying the Hindenburg Line, it was also arranged that a squadron of aeroplanes should perform a series of "stunts,"—looping, spiral dives, zooming, diabolic evolutions, flying low above the German lines between 8.30 and "zero hour."

As soon as it was dark, tapes were laid out 150 yards from the Hindenburg Line, upon which, shortly after midnight, creeping as stealthily as cats, three battalions in line, Rifles, Queen's, and Worcestershires, formed up for the assault. Their orders were that at "zero hour" they were to sprint for the Hindenburg Line. It was estimated that within thirty seconds an entry would have been effected into the Hindenburg Line by the swiftest runners, supported by the main body who, within a minute, with strong forces, would have covered the narrow strip of "No Man's Land." With the use of aeroplane photographs and patrols, certain gaps and weaknesses in the wire entanglements had been carefully noted, and patrols thrown out during the night, lying in scoops within a few yards of the Hindenburg Line, armed with flags, were to signal the gaps to the assaulting troops so that they would not be held up by stout wire, and could also spread out so as not to bunch together through the easier avenues of approach. Heroic work, this vigil by night and during the perilous hours following dawn, ready to wave the first runners to safe passage-way.

There was to be no previous bombardment, but, for four minutes covering the initial assault, a sudden hurricane bombardment clapped itself upon the support line, and was followed by a protective bombardment of two hours duration covering the consolidation. The machine-guns of the 100th and 19th Companies were again grouped for this operation. The night preceding the attack a camouflaged trench was dug again within 300 yards of the Hindenburg Line within full view of the enemy position. Twelve guns were placed in these scoops, and the teams were actually ready well before dawn. A battery of dummy guns and gunners was placed about one hundred yards in front, and to a flank, of the battery position in order to deceive the enemy. As a special enterprise two Lewis guns, in the hands of the Machine-Gun Corps, were given a free hand to work themselves forward by the Sensée Valley into the Hindenburg Line under cover of darkness, and to bring fire to bear upon any machine-guns which opened on the attacking troops at



THE HINDENBURG LINE AFTER THE BRITISH BOMBARDMENT
Showing destruction of the barbed wire entanglement, and obliteration of trenches by shell fire. The concrete
machine gun emplacements remain intact.



THE HINDENBURG LINE BARBED WIRE ENTANGLEMENT
After capture.

zero. So successful was this enterprise that one man succeeded in working his way right into the line before dawn, and in capturing several prisoners before zero hour.

The ruse of surprise was crowned by success. The essential element so used in place of the discredited methods of the Somme, following, and covered by, the short hurricane bombardment, enabled, within one minute the three Battalions to enter the Hindenburg Line with the loss of only one man wounded. Having rushed my guns into the line, my own particular job and that of my gunners was to take over, reverse and man with scratch crews the German machine-guns. I had most carefully noted their positions, and told off officers and N.C.O.'s to make their capture and to remount them on the parapets against counter-attack. We followed the first wave of Infantry, and, carrying the front line, swept on across the open ground into the Hindenburg support line. We captured great numbers of prisoners, wholly surprised as they came from their dugouts and tunnels, following their accustomed tactics to man the machine-guns and mow down the assault following the bombardment as it lifted.

The German machine-gunners, in their concrete emplacements, sprang to action, intending as before to cut off the assaulting troops from reserves across "No Man's Land." My men stormed down the line to each one of their posts, throwing bombs through the loopholes, and clubbing to death the machine-gunners, who already had commenced to sweep the Sensée Valley. In order to prevent surprise in our rear from the tunnels connecting underground from the support to the front line, also, co-operating with mopping-up parties, we systematically bombed all the dugouts, taking further prisoners as they debouched from the tunnels, and piling up the dead underground.

Following a severe bombardment, the enemy counter-attacked. On the 23rd April it had been our experience that the Germans had consistently and deliberately shot down the stretcher-bearers attempting to rescue the wounded in "No Man's Land" after our troops had been driven from the Hindenburg Line. An eye for an eye . . . I was able to direct the fire of guns and annihilated nineteen stretcher bearers who were not carrying wounded, but ammunition to the support trench. This was later confirmed by prisoners.

Only the front system of the Hindenburg Line had been secured. There remained the support line, some fifty yards in rear, an obstacle as formidable as had been that in front. On

the 27th May, a determined attack was made by the 2nd Royal Welch Fusiliers and the 5th Scottish Rifles.

At 2 p.m. the Infantry attacked in three waves, the men advancing shoulder to shoulder. But the enemy was fully prepared. His Artillery opened simultaneously with our own. His machine-guns had been taken from their emplacements and placed on the parapet in order to increase their field of fire. When our Infantry reached the enemy front line—a distance of 200 yards—there were many guns in the line. Devastating fire from the machine-guns had accounted for many hundreds of men. As they fell in the leading wave, men from the second were rushed forward to take their comrades' places. Thus the second and third waves were gradually merged into the first wave. The enemy fought stoutly and climbed out of their trench, lining the parapet to meet our attack. Officers, N.C.O's and most of the men were in shirt-sleeves. For more than an hour the bitterest hand-to-hand fighting took place, and many an individual contest was decided without weapons as primitive warriors fought, the combatants locked together, rolling from the parapet and falling into the trench to be seen no more. When the fighting had reached its height, and with the result still doubtful, the Germans rushed up reinforcements from his reserve trenches and forced back all that were left of our exhausted men. My two forward machine-guns remained intact, covering the withdrawal of the Infantry by placing an impenetrable curtain of fire across the front.

Until nightfall enemy snipers kept up a continuous fire upon our wounded, many of whom were writhing in agony immediately in front of his line. Their cries continued throughout the night. It was impossible to render any aid, but we permitted enemy patrols to move without interruption in "No Man's Land" with the hope that aid would be rendered to the wounded. These were, however, as we realized in the morning, slaughtered where they lay.

The casualties during this final assault were extraordinarily severe. Of officers, the 20th Royal Fusiliers lost 15, the 2nd Royal Welch Fusiliers—24, the 1st Cameronians—19, and the 5th Scottish Rifles—19. It will be observed, therefore, from these figures how difficult it often was to rebuild the fighting units. These three battalions were those comprising the 19th Brigade. The other two Brigades of the Division, the 98th and 100th, lost a total of 116 officers, giving a grand total of 193 officers lost to the Division during three weeks in May 1917.

It requires more than usual powers of organization to stage within the same month, in an area which has never known such performances before, both a Horse Show and a Race Meeting.

Skill in improvisation, no less than enthusiasm, produced a Race Meeting upon the sward at Ayette, only a degree less in the sport offered and in the appetencies which occasion the fun of the race-course than, for example, those of Windsor, Ayr, or Newbury.

The Arras Spring Meeting, as it was known, produced an Enclosure and Grand Stand "For Country Gentlemen and Officers Only," with the added legend, "Beware of Pickpockets." Tattersall's Ring, the Judge's Box, Paddock and Weighing-in Rooms, all were improvised. Even "Charlie's Bar" reappeared with its accustomed popularity. One Brigadier drove a four-in-hand on to the course, his own two chargers as leaders, and a G.S. wagon embellished by pioneers to represent a coach. Book-makers swarmed in top-hats and bowlers, the odds changing wildly.

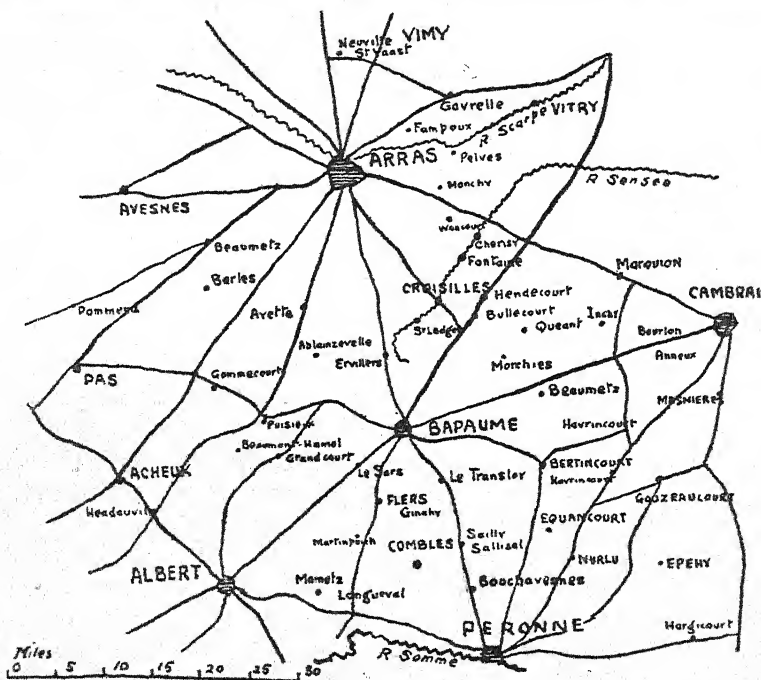
Entries numbered hundreds, including many mules. The names of the runners expressed the spirit of the Warrior. Three mules of vicious tendency—"Faith, Hope, and Charity," the most vicious, the greatest of these, "Love," of the Worcestershire Regiment. The Highland Regiments, Argylls and H.L.I., produced such classics as "Flying Fox," "White Heather," "Persimmon," and "Lemberg," amongst animals as nobby and tufted as only the after-effects of a winter campaign can make light draught horses. The Middlesex, Queen's, and Royal Fusiliers were local and homely, as behoves Cockney humour, "Napoo," "Umteen," "Farrier's Friend"—the unshoeable—"U-boat," and the Bing Boys "George" and "Alfred." The Staff, enjoying the privilege of frequent leave in London and Paris, favoured the stage, thus "Gaby," "Delysia," "Zena," and "Phyllis."

The races for various classes were named after villages on the immediate battlefield—the Adinfer Stakes; the Boiry Maiden Plate; the St. Ledger Stakes, following the classic, but named after a captured village; the Ayette Maiden Plate; and finally the Domino Stakes, from the Divisional sign; and the Prix d'Alphonso, as it suggests, an open flat race for mules.

The Divisional Commander was the conspicuous figure in the Judge's Box, and the success of the Meeting was an expression of the good humour of men, who recently and with such sacrifice had carried the burden of the battle.

The Horse Show, held on the downs of Cavillon, above Picquigny, was no less generous in its organization and equally successful.

It is difficult for an Infantry Battalion to compete on level terms with the Headquarters Company of the Divisional train of the A.S.C., as an officer bitterly remarked—"God made the animals, and the A.S.C. dished them out." But when it comes to the burnishing of steel chains and stirrup irons, to the polishing



SKETCH MAP OF THE SOMME & ARRAS
BATTLEFIELDS.

of leather and to the grooming of animals' coats until they shine like polished metal, then the Infantry Transport driver concedes nothing to the Services who have first claim upon the animals.

Again the Horse Show proved to be not only an admirable stimulus to morale, but that the zeal of the Warrior is insatiable. Great numbers of French farmers and peasants came to the Show ground, keenly critical and much surprised, while a gracious lady, the Comtesse de Hauteclocque, distributed the prizes.

The Division was withdrawn to rest in the area of Cavillon,

Picquigny, and Hangest, where it remained throughout the whole month of July, one of most happy memory.

For anyone, especially the traveller of a later generation, visiting the battlefields, there must be some difficulty in separating the battle areas one from another. Especially, perhaps, is this so in respect of the battlefields of the Somme and of Arras. The Battles of the Somme in 1916 and 1918 were mainly confined to the area lying between the river itself and the Amiens-Cambrai road running through Albert and Bapaume. But of 1916, the actions astride the River Ancre and as far north as Gommecourt must be included. A line drawn through the latter village due east demarks the northern boundary of the Somme battlefield.

Arras is a considerable town, a railway centre, to which many roads, those from Béthune, Lens, Douai, Cambrai, Bapaume, Amiens, converge like the spokes of a wheel. The town lies on the River Gy, a tributary of the Scarpe, and the River Grinchon joins the Gy in the centre of the town.

The Arras battlefield lies between the Bapaume-Cambrai road and Vimy on the Arras-Liège road ; and a line projected due east from Vimy states the northern boundary of the battlefield.

To the north of Vimy Ridge the character of the landscape changes so obviously that there is little difficulty in discovering the battlefield of Loos, confined to the area between Lens and the La Bassée Canal ; while the points of the Battle of the Lys lie between the Canal and Ypres.

The battlefield of Arras, like that of the Somme, is one of copses, downs, pasture, and agricultural land, and the subsoil is of chalk. To the north, the countryside, the Department of Artois, with Béthune as its centre, serving the great industrial city of Lille with coal, is studded with pit-head erections and slag-heaps. With the exception of these excrescences, for more than twenty miles northwards until Mont Kemmel and the Belgian Hills define themselves, the topography of the land possesses no distinguishing feature. It is almost as flat as a board, and low-lying. Indeed, a farmer informed me in early 1915 that had the winter rains been normal it would have been physically impossible to construct trenches in the La Bassée-Armentières area at all, for usually the land had been waterlogged during the winter months.

As on the Somme, tremendously hard fighting took place opposite to Arras three times over two years. Both the British blow in the spring of 1917 and that of the Germans against the 5th Army in March 1918 were swifter than the first British

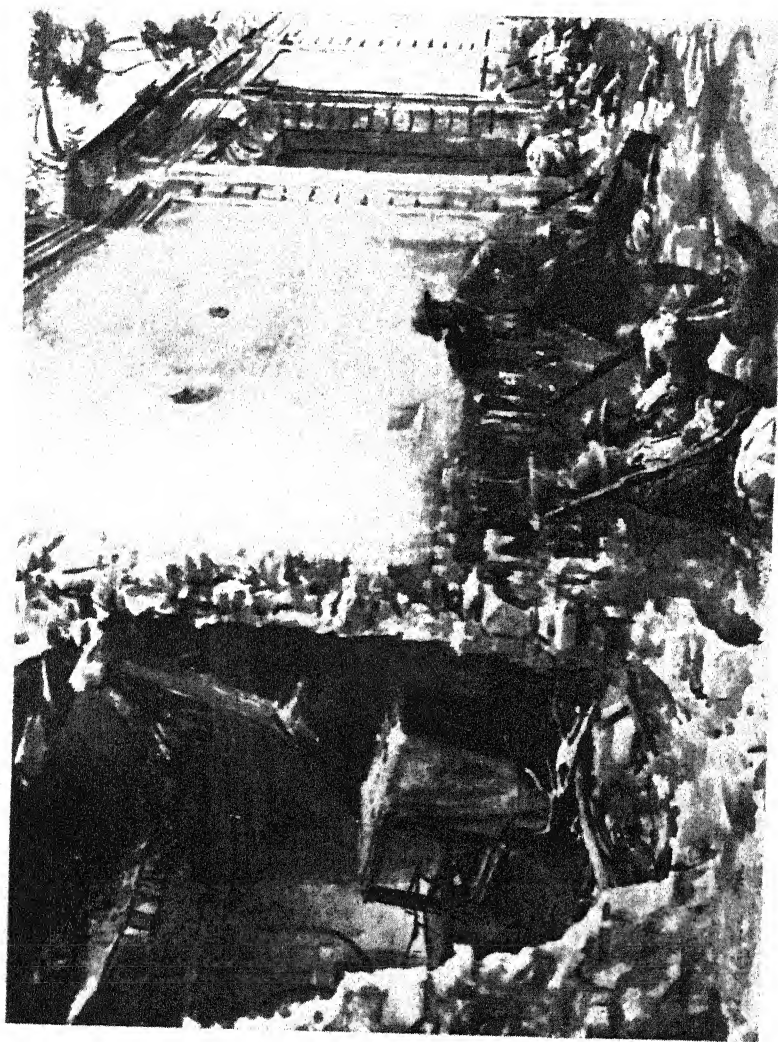
offensive on the Somme. In 1918, therefore, when again across the old Arras battlefield we fought the enemy back to the Hindenburg Line, villages and farmhouses, although shattered, were still recognizable as such. Whereas in the Somme area approximately 400 square miles had been so pounded and pulverized that, except as references on the map indicating cross-roads, the villages had wholly disappeared. For example, Guillemont, Ginchy, and Longueval were entirely lost, and resembled only the static mud waves of their surrounding shell-holed pastures. This is true, also, of the whole of the Ypres Salient, although miraculously the Cloth Hall, shorn of its mediæval splendour, until the end still raised its battered tower ; and such landmarks as Swan Château at the corner of Zillebeke Lake, and the cluster of houses known as " Belgian Battery Corner," although a death-trap outside, survived a direct hit, and, used variously as an Artillery headquarters and an aid post, preserved even their tiled roofs until the Armistice.

It may be noticed, also, that although Nature in her woods and orchards, crops and grass-lands perished under high explosive and gas attacks, in the moat which lay to the east of the ancient buttressed ramparts of Ypres, two swans, male and female, could daily be observed making their stately swim around the moat, like a general and his aide-de-camp inspecting billets in a back area. And each year, in the spring, the swans built their nest and brought up their family. The children winged away to safer habitations, while the parents remained as the mascots and guardians for the successive Divisional Headquarters which were dug into the ramparts behind.

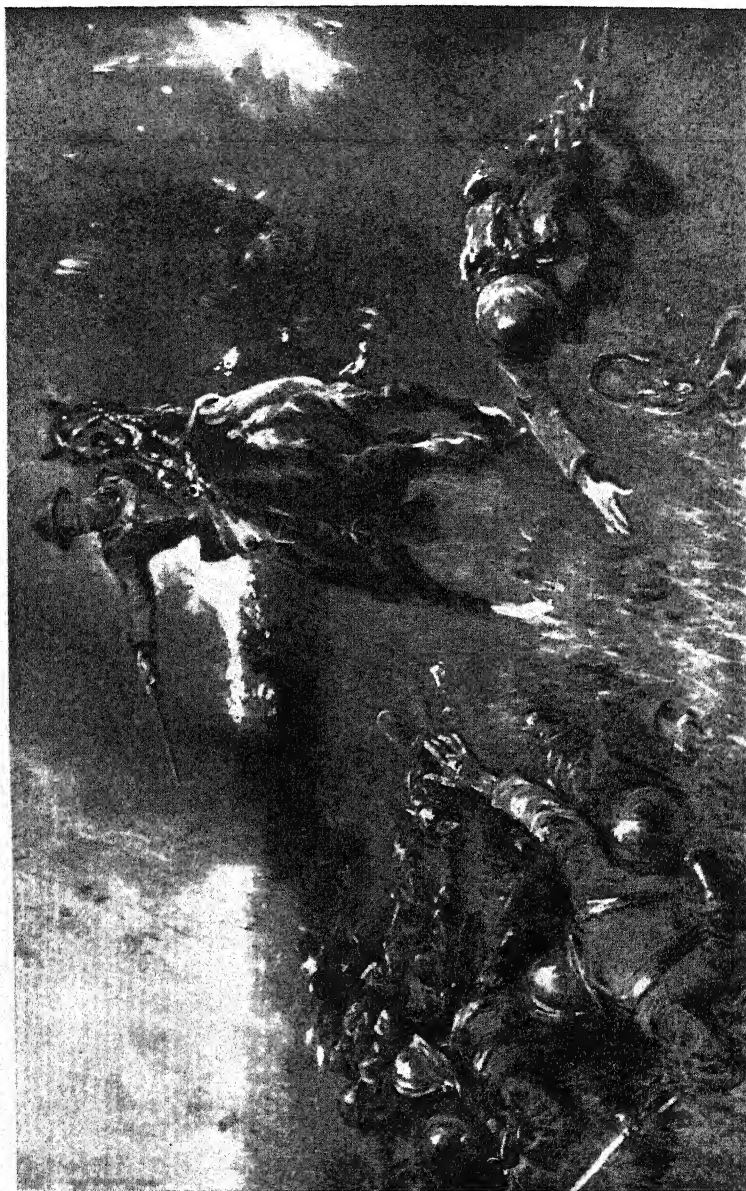
But upon the Somme, at Passchendaele and at Arras every living thing was stricken.

The battlefield of Arras centres upon the town. Up till April 1917 the German Line was within one mile of the market-place, while the suburbs extended west across the Hindenburg Line. For great numbers of troops simultaneously to debouch from the narrow exits of the town was fraught with peril. In order to avoid a passage through the narrow streets, a considerable feat of military engineering was undertaken. The cellars were linked together by tunnels ; and into the subterranean galleries thus formed were placed three Divisions, with every possible convenience for comfort, including a narrow-gauge tramway, electric light, water, and an underground hospital with seven hundred beds.

The town of Arras was the fulcrum of the battlefield, and to its



*
"A STREET IN ARRAS"
From the painting by John S. Sargent, R.A.



W

"FOR VALOUR"

Great courage, initiative, quick senses in appreciation of the situation, inspiring leadership—these are the qualities required of the officer on the battle-field.
(Lt. Colonel G. W. St. G. Grogan (Worcestershire) earns the Victoria Cross on the Bontense Ridge, 21 May, 1918.)

From the drawing by Gilbert Holiday.

east lay the formidable Hindenburg Line to which the Germans had withdrawn earlier in the year. The strength of these defences cannot be exaggerated ; while behind the front system of two lines, inter-communicating underground, with deep dug-outs and galleries lighted by electricity, lay the Siegfried Line with a number of switch lines and defended points, all of which were conceived making the fullest use of contour and natural defence. Between Bantouzelle and Bellicourt, the St. Quentin Canal formed a natural obstacle in front of the Siegfried Line, covering Le Catelet and the roads to Mons and Maubeuge.

The fighting on the 9th of April covered a front stretching from Lens in Artois, across the Vimy Ridge, through Farbus and Thelus, crossing the River Scarpe as far south as Croisilles. Twenty-seven Infantry Divisions were engaged with three Cavalry Divisions ; and nineteen of the former participated in the first attack. The first Battle of Arras succeeded only in establishing our posts in the Hindenburg system, extending the line east from Vimy Ridge through Fontaine, Queant, with the Salient in front of Havrincourt, and thence south-east to within a mile of the town of St. Quentin.

When on 21st March, 1918, the German blow fell against the 5th Army, the line was hurled back from before Arras, through Ayette, Beaumont Hamel to Albert, and thence through Bray to within ten miles of Amiens. The whole of the territory gained in the Battle of Arras was again lost ; and the loss included, also, not only the Somme battlefield, but many miles of the area west of the former British Line as on 1st July, 1916. The great German offensive made one of these two battlefields, when with odds of forty Divisions to fourteen, and 3,500 guns against 13,000, they delivered their onslaught against Gough's Army. When in September 1918 the Allied offensive followed hard on the heels of the German retreat back again to the defences of the Hindenburg Line, that great area south of Arras, and just west of Amiens, to Cambrai and St. Quentin, had been stripped of almost every vestige of vegetation, its trees hacked down, and such buildings as had survived the earlier battles had been razed to the ground. The familiarities of St. Ledger, Croisilles, Ayette, were gone, marked only by the splintered crosses of their cemeteries. Only farther south on the northern edge of the old Somme battlefield, and where it joined with that of Arras, had the buildings in the villages survived. Heudicourt, Gouzeaucourt, Epehy, and Villers Guislain remained as gaunt ruins. Yet only a mile or two west of the Siegfried Line, at Villers Outreaux, at Clary, and at Bertry,

the priests still held Mass and Matins and Vespers in churches untouched by shell-fire, while the inhabitants, although suffering German billeting, went about their ordinary occupations.

It was in Bertry, first reached by ourselves, that I established my Battalion Headquarters with its flag before the advanced patrols had reached the village. For fifty miles to the west the scourge of war had visited the fields, and not a living thing remained, other than the Warrior and his animals.

It was in Bertry, too, just before my arrival, that a cavalry patrol had entered. It was halted by a bearded man attired in dishevelled raiment. This man, Private Fowler of the 11th Hussars, had been missing since the Battle of Le Cateau in August 1914, and as an amazing coincidence he was a member of the Regiment to which this first patrol belonged. For four years he had lived in a cupboard unsuspected by the enemy, sleeping in the underpart of a huge French bed and attended and fed by a peasant woman, Madame Belmont-Gobert, with her daughter Angele, from their meagre rations.

From January 1915 until 9th October, 1918, this man had been harboured by these brave women.

The desire to free the English coasts and the Channel line of communication from the menace of the U-boat inspired a plan at G.H.Q. which, perhaps fortunately, never fructified. For the same reasons as inspired the British offensive at Third Ypres, during July some Divisions were ear-marked in secrecy for a landing on the Belgian coast, north-east of Nieuport, behind the extreme right flank of the German Army. This was a "hush-hush" affair. The Divisions ordered for this assault were segregated secretly; and the plan was that, riding on enormous rafts, they should be towed round the coast and effect a landing, covered by the guns of British men-o'-war. Despite precautions, information reached the ears of the German General Staff. At the end of July, to anticipate British action, the Germans attacked at Nieuport and at Lombardtsyde in strength, practically annihilating a Brigade of the 1st Division.

From the joys of Picquigny we were hurried to relief, and took over a line wholly new to our experience. The front itself was dull and dirty, frequently criss-crossed by inundations of the Yser Canal. Nieuport, but a hulk of its peace-time self, offered fair security in its cellarage; and as a miracle the crucifix in the shattered church still hung in its accustomed place.

But during August there was much joy to be found in the now-fashionable watering-places along the Belgian coast. For miles

along the sands at La Panne soldiers bathed in nakedness, risking an occasional shell which exploded on the sands or along the dunes, in the same way as they everywhere played football under shell-fire. The bathers offered, too, a tempting target for air-men, who sometimes sped the sands shooting machine-guns. I recollect, when great numbers of us once were in the sea, a German aeroplane appeared. Some threw themselves flat on the sand, and others, like myself, dived beneath the water hoping for the best. But this airman must have possessed some high sense of humour, and found joy in the picture of the sea with its bathers, for he circled above us, crackling a machine-gun, like laughter, in the air; and then, braving the "Archies" fired at him, swooped down to within a few feet of the sands, described a circle, and went back to his own lines. Surely, at little peril, he might have killed and wounded hundreds of men, unarmed, even unclothed.

Two new forms of what in those days was known as "frightfulness" visited us while in the Nieuport Sector.

By those who have only experienced the mild sensation of scurrying into cellars and Tubes in London during the night wanderings of the Zeppelin, the annoyance to troops in reserve, and to civilians immediately behind the battle front, of night bombing can scarcely be imagined. Belgium presents no very difficult problem for the night-flying airman, due to its network of well-defined canals, its huge forests, and its otherwise flat country. All these landmarks are very plain. From the autumn of 1917 scarcely a night passed but a shower of bombs was let loose upon our camps and billets, often with serious results in loss of life. The horse lines, which of necessity were regular in form, suffered most. Bombing in one's immediate neighbourhood sent cold shivers of fear down the spine. Only one place was entirely safe except for a direct hit, and that was a grave dug in the earth. The Nissen huts which formed most of the billeting quarters were peculiarly vulnerable. The anxiety undergone by officers commanding troops for their safety, when the men were huddled together in a narrow area preparatory to battle, cannot be exaggerated. There is something most terrifying in the swish and boom of falling bombs, even when more than a hundred yards from the awakened sleeper they merely expend their force in blowing swedes and turnips sky-high.

And mustard-gas was now first introduced. At first this new horror was difficult to cope with. Not only did it choke the lungs, but it inflicted, also, severe burns upon the flesh. The two

kilted Battalions in the Division, the 93rd Highlanders and the 9th H.L.I., were the first to be submitted to shelling with mustard-gas. Those afflicted suffered awful agonies. A conference was called at Divisional Headquarters to decide as to the best means of dealing with this new gas, and for providing effective measures against it. It was agreed that the Highlanders must be forthwith equipped with long cotton drawers. Highland officers were asked to submit proposals as to what form these drawers should take ; colour, number of buttons, and the details required with such exactitude by an Ordnance Service which can only think in terms of " Drawers, cotton, pink, legs long, buttons four, Highland Regiments for the use of." All the latent genius of " Q " was employed in the production of these pants ; and the Highland Regiments could be observed later in the line, safely attired in drawers, presenting an appearance of standard lamps, their kilts resembling the shades.

On our immediate right was a Belgian Division, which had held this line continuously since October 1914. They dwelt in a network of islands in which they had made themselves most comfortable, with even field bakeries in the front line, almost at home in this last frontier of their Belgium.

CHAPTER XI

THIRD YPRES

SEPTEMBER 1917

The Spirit of Ypres—Battle of the Menin Road—Machine-gun batteries—Reflections of a C.O. on a duck track—Staff and Regimental officers—Shell-shock—German counter-attack—Attacking according to plan—Duty and the wounded—Devastation by M.G. fire—Flammenwerfer—Congratulatory messages—Firing on stretcher bearers.

THEY grate their teeth until we take their room,
And through the churn of moonless night and mud
And flaming burst and sour gas we are huddled
Into the ditches where they bawl sense awake,
And in a frenzy that none could reason calm,
(Whimpering some, and calling on the dead)
They turn away : as in a dream they find
Strength in their feet to bear back that strange whim
Their body.

Still wept the rain, roared guns,
Still swooped into the swamps of flesh and blood,
All to the drabness of uncreation sunk,
And all thought dwindled to a moan, Relieve !
But who with what command can now relieve
The dead men from that chaos, or my soul ?¹

YPRES, almost personified, spiritually if not in flesh and blood, in its stricken tower of masonry, the Cloth Hall. Out from the Menin Gate north-east, east, south-east, to the extremities of the fan-shaped Salient—Langemarck, Passchendaele, Broodseinde, Gheluvelt, Ploegsteert. The Salient itself, pock-marked and obscene with shell-holes.

The tree-tops of Polyglon Wood, or Inverness Copse, mere splintered stumps, swift landmarks against a star-shell-lighted horizon. Roads, pitted, ugly with metal-blazed baulks of timber, their sides piled with stinking carcasses, mere tracks over which tramp silently ten thousand men going east, and, coming west,

¹ From "Third Ypres," by Edmund Blunden.

limp and trickle as many thousand more. Among them are horses, hairy as Highland cattle, dragging guns axle-deep in mud across the wasted fields and macadamless roads of Potijze or Zonnebeke, in bitter wind and driving rain, with no other light to brighten their journey into the unknown than the quick-cut flash of bursting cordite or that of the fog-veiled star-shell. Those who live and have their being in the Salient remain the audience of a sublime orchestra, whose crescendo of shrieking shell and thunder of gun intermittently thrills and appals, and whose pianissimo of distant cry coming over the sky-line at dawn lulls them to fitful slumber.

How we, who, through long years have known the ebb and flow of the Salient, who have witnessed the dissolution of its monuments into dust, and have seen its woods and pastures incredibly churned and twisted, rent and upheaved to make a diplomatic holiday ; how we, who for all time will be haunted by Ypres, have hated, yet with equal passion loved, that Inferno before which the most terrifying vision of Hell becomes but a playground.

The Battles of Ypres tested the qualities of human courage, fortitude, patience, and self-sacrifice, unmatched by any other struggle in all the anguish of world history. No one will ever believe, who has not ventured through the storm of steel across the muddy fastnesses of Passchendaele, where death in ratchewed flesh and gas-bleached bones grinned from every shell-hole ; or who has not wallowed through the black slime of Dumbarton Lakes, and finally has found a moment of gaseous sanctuary in the dirty depths of Tyne Cott's pillbox, that men lived and triumphed under conditions which so numbed the limbs and paralysed the spirit. "They were a wall unto us by day and night."

If we, who knew Ypres and suffered in its Salient, love Ypres, it is because the qualities of comradeship which found expression there, and the self-sacrifice which was hourly demanded, transcends all other human emotion and has consecrated for us for all time the fields and copses and bitter landscape of that area of all men's heritage. There sleep for ever tens of thousands of our comrades whose physical and spiritual experience was so uniquely attuned to our own. No one who did not know Ypres can ever realize to what depths human emotion was stirred when we lay shoulder to shoulder in a shell-hole, beneath the scourge of *tömmel feuer* under pitiless rain with death all around ; or were miraculously saved to share a blanket for a few sweet hours of



A HIGHLAND SOLDIER AT YPRES
Sketched in the field.



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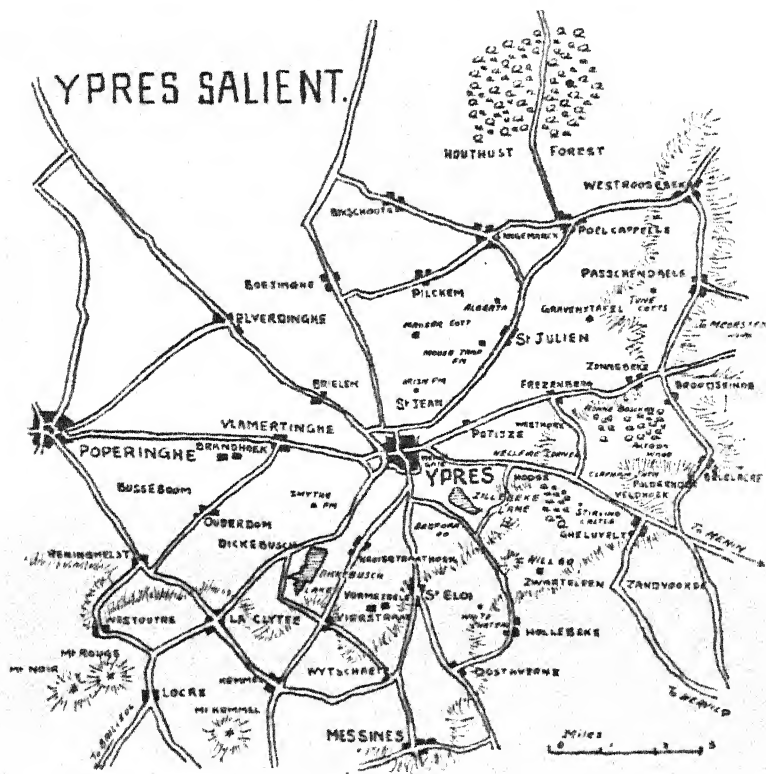
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ABOVE: A TIMBER TRACK ACROSS THE YPRES SALIENT

BELOW: YPRES MUD

human confidence and communion in the bowels of the earth, foetid, rank, and sticky.

Every stone, every tree of the Salient became for us haunted with memory. If the pilgrim, and he cannot be otherwise described, wanders alone along the Menin Road, up through Zonnebeke, on to the Ridge to the east, or further north to Passchendaele, and faces west, to-day, and for so long as pilgrim veterans return to review the battlefield, in truth they must



confess that here, as they survey the Salient, though they never yielded to the foe, their hearts have been surrendered to a love, passing that of women.

How many cameos of that comradeship of endeavour do we not remember ! From the gay lights of Poperinghe, the estaminets of Abeele, the quiet lakes of Dickebusch and Zillebeke, often lashed to fury by shell-fire and from the battles which raged in Sanctuary Wood, Stirling Castle, even before the honeycombed ramparts of the city.

Until September 1917 I had avoided Ypres. None of my seeking. The unkind reputation of this zone would have drawn me. Men stated emphatically there was nothing so perfectly beastly ; and they said other things, too. They were old soldiers who had known " Plugstreet " and La Bassée, the Somme, and the dykes of Nieuport. I was curious to know the Salient. Though I waited till " Third Ypres," I had my fill.

The Third Battle of Ypres bit three miles farther east into the German defences, but it was a victory with no sweets. The enemy gave only a crumbling mud honeycomb filled with sticky gaseous slime. The fight for Passchendaele and Broodseinde Ridge is so much a part of the story of the Warrior that without its detailed history his aspect might indeed be very different. At no stage in this or any other war were the courage and endurance of man tried more highly. Never in the history of our race has man so fulfilled its matchless tradition.

God knows what cynical wit christened those splintered stumps Inverness Copse or Sanctuary Wood. Who named that stinking quagmire Dumbarton Lakes? And who ordained that those treacherous heaps of filth should be known as Stirling Castle or Northampton Farm?

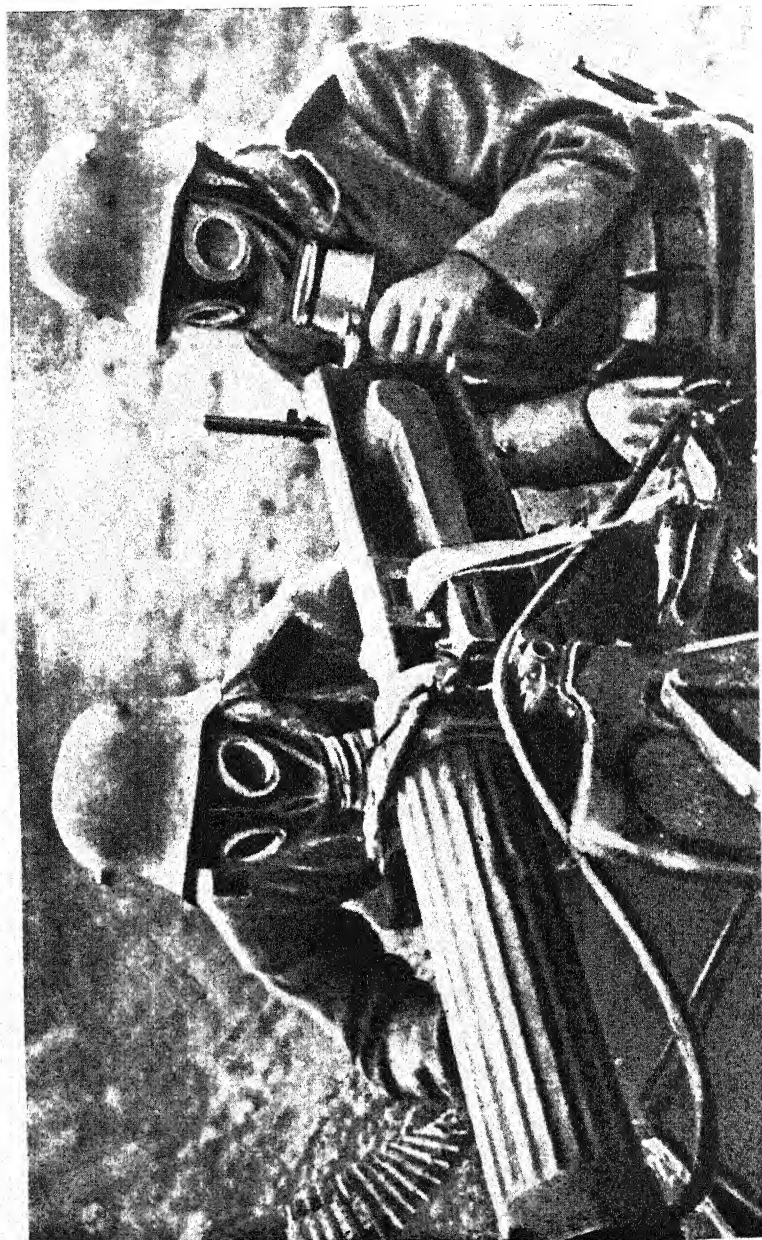
The maps with which I was presented prior to battle betrayed nothing of the chaos, which at every yard of reconnaissance or attack mocked the eye.

We arrived at the rendez-vous. I drew rein, dismounted, gave my men leave to slumber beside the waters on the northern shore of Dickebusch Lake. How Elysian it sounds, written so. Limbers almost axle-high in muck, men sweating from the smallest effort of movement, yet chilled with cold rain-laden wind. Even at this point of concentration, at least recognizable in form, men could but squat and huddle, while sheer fatigue freed them from consciousness. And so they slept on the eve of battle.

Already orders had been issued for a second attack upon the Ridge to include the capture of Polygon Wood, the Reutelbeeke and Polderhoek Château on the 33rd Divisional Front. Even by this date the casualties of the British Army had exceeded those which it is understood that the Prime Minister had agreed could be the maximum to be expended on this adventure. Regardless, however, apparently, of its preconceived ideas, of the available manhood of Great Britain, General Headquarters committed itself to the task of continuing the onslaught, when it must have been known only too well that such a task could only be extremely costly. Von Clausewitz has written that no military operation



GERMAN RUNNER FROM THE FRONT LINE



GERMAN MACHINE-GUNNERS IN GAS MASKS, PREPARED TO WITHSTAND ASSAULT

can be termed a success, unless the strategical or tactical advantages obtained are commensurate with the losses incurred. It was obvious to all who took part in these operations, which led to the boggy morasses of Passchendaele, that such could never be the case. Had this been realized at the time, the agonies which our troops suffered in March and April 1918 might probably have been largely prevented. We now know that the Prime Minister, Mr. Lloyd George, as well as some of his most highly placed advisers, and the French General Staff, opposed the determination of Sir Douglas Haig to pursue the Passchendaele adventure. All the weight of historical evidence condemns Haig's decision. Having regard to the shortage of available man-power, the offensive was in any case a grave risk. Strategical considerations should have put it out of court. All the later experience of the Somme battle determined that an offensive begun so late in the year, over a terrain far more vile than that of the Somme area, against an enemy even better positioned, was doomed to failure.

Very little time was available for reconnaissance and for the dumping of ammunition in the forward area. It seemed inconceivable that those who were directing operations could so blindly continue to issue orders to troops, whose fatigue was so great and whose casualties were so heavy in the task's execution that nothing but almost superhuman courage urged them to fulfil this futility.

With my groom next day I rode forward, my mount slithering and stumbling upon baulks of timber, logs torn from woods and copses to make a track for tanks and artillery. Beside a burrow, belching smoke, and smelling sweetly of savoury cooking, I handed my horse to the groom, and surveyed a map. At Holybone I had arrived. Two bedraggled signallers, sitting in smoke, curtly told the groom to remove our horses. He wandered sadly a little way back along the track while a German aeroplane hovered far overhead.

I walked on to the east, then set my map. Gone were the châteaux, farms, and woods of which it spoke. To the east nothing but pools of yellow undulations. I guessed the quality of the churnings for along the horizon, and often round and about shrieked and dived great shells heaving volumes of mud into the air, accompanied by clouds of spray. I would watch the shells plunge. So deep, so yielding was the soil in its embrace that seconds passed before impact against anything solid which might detonate the metal mass. Then, as if by some angered reptile of

the nether world, the earth's surface would heave and spout and flash with fire, emitting black fumes before delivering itself of a tempestuous diarrhoea. A shower of gangrenous metal and yellow mud.

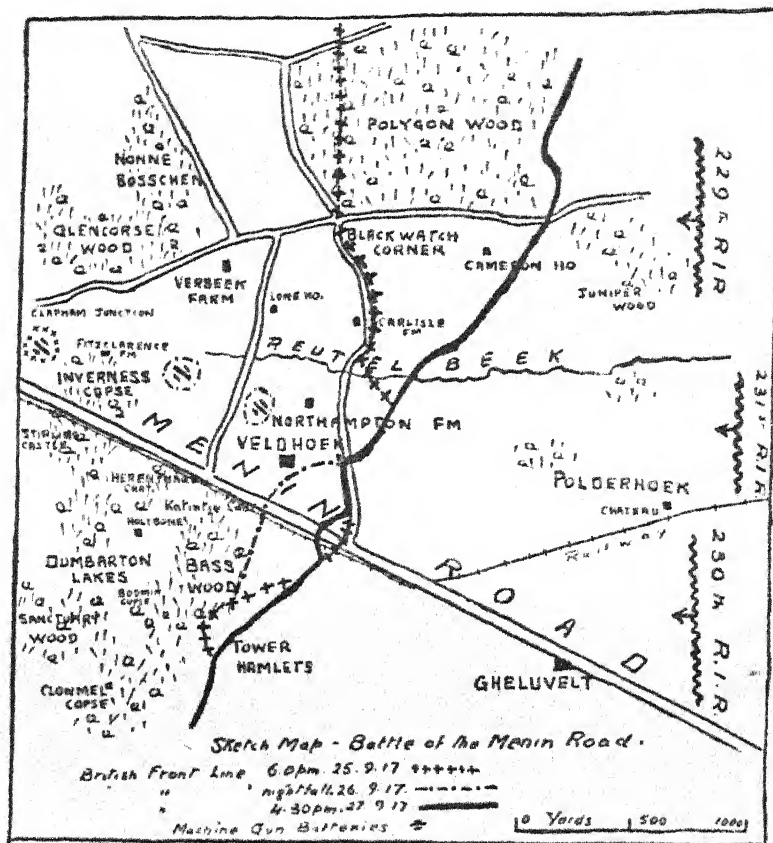
With the aid of a compass I learned the general direction of the attack objective. We would go east from astride the Menin Road by Herenthage Château. I noted a derelict tank—thank Heavens for that landmark—and an unburied corpse or two, which marked the track from Holybone. Then I returned to my horses. The map sheet was a fair deceiver. But a bogged tank, unburied dead, and a spray vomitting mud along the horizon gave me the lie of the land. To this battleground on the morrow would I lead my troops.

I was unfortunate, for as a machine-gunner I had to play the dual rôle of Infantry and Artillery. In consequence, with my gunners, I fought in two consecutive actions. According to custom the Divisional Artillery remained in action to cover several phases of Infantry assault. Thus it covered several Divisional waves of assault. The Infantry Division was, on the other hand, involved in but one phase of assault with prescribed objectives, after the capture of which some fresh Division would go through its forward posts and continue the assault. That was the Infantry function if the attack went according to plan. But, with the possible exceptions of Plumer's attack at Messines, and that of Byng upon Vimy Ridge, both very limited objectives, no major British attack ever fulfilled expectations. Usually, therefore, the Infantry Division, after a few hours, or a day or two at the longest, was relieved after being held up or almost annihilated.

Machine-gunners, like Infantry, moved on their feet, and fought with the front waves of assault or became the rallying-points in defence.

The capacity of the Vickers gun, providing not only the most powerful direct fire, but a controlled bullet-storm, fired at long ranges over the heads of the assaulting waves of Infantry, realized for the Machine-Gun Corps a rôle, also, akin to that of Field Artillery. Every Machine-Gun Company not required for the first waves of assault and consolidation with its own Division was now detached to give covering fire to the assault of other Divisions. Grouped under the direction of the Corps or Divisional Machine-gun Officer, guns and gunners were placed in barrage positions some twelve or fifteen hundred yards behind the objective line. Gun teams were occupied for some days prior to the attack in

bringing ammunition up to the barrage positions. These often, owing to the fire-angle necessity imposed by topography, were in exposed positions, and always in the very middle of the enemy's heaviest counter-barrage. The siting position of the machine-gun batteries was the area in which reserves to the assault would



be concentrated, and here fell the greatest storm of enemy shell-fire.

Nevertheless, following most successful experiments on the sands at Camiers, where was situated the Machine-Gun School, and since the later stages of the Somme battle, the practice of concentrated overhead machine-gun fire rid the Infantry of its first nervousness, and they were appreciative of its devastating effect.

By the opening of the battle of the Menin Road, known as the Third Battle of Ypres, G.H.Q. was deeply impressed with the

power of machine-guns in this apparently new rôle, although the possibilities had been explored at the School of Musketry at Hythe prior to hostilities.

I found myself, therefore, in command of the four Divisional Machine-Gun Companies, grouped with others in support of the 23rd Division, whose Infantry attack upon Inverness Copse and Polygon Wood, with the added objectives of Passchendaele and Westroosebeke, was to precede the passage of the 33rd Division into the open country beyond.

I had made my first reconnaissance on the morning of the 18th September. From the following day until the 27th we were occupied in transporting hundreds of thousands of rounds of ammunition to the barrage positions. Over the very slushy ground it required two men to carry each ammunition box. The Divisional Ammunition Column sent up no less than 700,000 rounds on pack mules as far as Holybone, a considerable feat of organization and patience. From this spot, under sudden and violent shell-storms, or subject to the annoyance of being sniped by field-guns, my machine-gunners man-handled the boxes across a mile of shell-pocked land to the positions. The burden was most severe, following, as it did, a march from bivouacs over the broken, pitted, mud-covered track of eight miles.

No troops were more sorely tried than were machine-gunners in this most exhausting of all battles on the Western Front.

The journey backwards and forwards over those long stricken tracks, provided hours for silent contemplation.

We are not fighting and organizing, or even playing in billets, all the time. Many hours are filled with long and lonely tramps across barren fields. And often, with the wise old man from the pages of *Punch*, "sometimes I sits and thinks, and sometimes I just sits." This then is a diversion of thought, while we accompany one another, mostly in silence, for no man can make himself intelligible, except in short sharp cries, against the thunder of sixty pounders, on the track from Stirling Castle Ridge back to Dickebusch.

It must be obvious that since there were many men of the highest intelligence gathered from out of civil occupations in which they had won the respect of their fellows, serving in the lower commands and ranks of a citizen army, a capacity for logical and hard thinking remained. As a Commander of one thousand men or more I found it frequently embarrassing when in chance conversation with a subaltern or sergeant to be asked to give reasons why.

For example, "Why do we always make our attacks in winter when any fool who knows anything about the front can see that they're bound to be a failure?" . . . "Why are the French attacks more successful than our own : they take tens of thousands of prisoners and advance miles with half our loss?" . . . "What's the object of attacking Passchendaele? It only makes our position worse for the subsequent winter, and the position of the Germans better. Behind us there will be miles of land quite impassable except over tracks laid on sleepers which will be shelled to blazes day and night. . . . Surely the experience of October and November on the Somme has taught G.H.Q. that it's sheer waste of life and material to attempt a breakthrough this season?" . . . "Are we really short of man power? If not, why are so many men being combed out of the transport services, and boys and Derby men being called up at home?" . . . "Why don't we sit tight while the fresh reserves are being inured to these conditions?" . . . "Why don't they give us a decent chance in the spring?" . . . "Why do we always read in the newspapers that immense numbers of German dead have fallen to our arms, when as a matter of fact we all know that in these attacks our losses are usually about twenty to one? For one German corpse in 'No Man's Land' there are dozens of British. When we take a trench there are only a few pounded bodies in the débris, and we are blown to hell."

Intelligent questions have to be answered with intelligence. I had friends on various staffs ; and whenever an opportunity presented itself I used to look for them at a Corps, or Army Headquarters. Then, after the usual "Cheerio" and a drink I would gently press my questions. I did so in fact in respect of the battle of the Menin Road. The answer, somewhat vague, was that our offensive before Ypres was intended to relieve the French in the south from German pressure. Several corps of the French, so I was informed, had mutinied : very hush hush, of course ; but the truth. If the British did not continue to keep the enemy fully preoccupied there was grave danger of a weakened French front being pierced and the flank of the Allied Army being turned. For me this was a satisfactory answer, although it turned out to be an incorrect relation of facts based on reason. High strategy, even statecraft, was involved.

I read and heard, too, of disputations in the French Senate ; of French Army Commanders being "Stellenbosched," to use the old phrase borrowed from 1902, or to bring it up-to-date in terms of Flanders—"degomméd," or as the French said "Limogé"—

after Limoges, a playground for faulty French generals equivalent to the "Stellenbosch" of South Africa for British officers who had made a mess of things, or were merely unpopular.

Public opinion in France was seeking for some new Commander upon whom to hang their hopes. The disaster of the Chemin-des-Dames had caused the French nation to lose all faith. Foch had been banished to obscurity. Joffre still sought to defend a vanishing reputation. Nivelle had been eclipsed. Marshal Lyautey, who had been brought to Paris from Morocco as Minister of War to exercise his autocracy, had resigned. Only Pétain, perhaps less known, retained his reputation. So, while the French found a new Commander-in-Chief for their Armies, as I was given to understand at the time, the British Army was called upon to bear the burden of this new attack.

The cold analysis of history has since taught us that such was not the fact. On the Somme, in October and November 1916, by the obvious misuse of the weapon of surprise, the tank, too few in numbers and too late in season, with tired troops, Haig had believed that his Army could break through to Bapaume and beyond, when those familiar with the ground knew that even without enemy opposition it was well-nigh impassable. Again, in the Third Battle of Ypres, G.H.Q. seems to have been possessed of an almost childish faith in chalk lines and arrows drawn on a map, while those to whom the attack plans were issued were assured from past experience that the objectives could not be won, even by the most redoubtable troops in the world. As to such troops the Divisions which made the assaults along the Menin Road were incomparable.

It is small wonder, therefore, that a feeling of exasperation grew in the minds of fighting troops against the Staffs. Red tabs on the facings of those with whom lesser commanders and soldiers were in daily contact, the staffs of Brigades and Divisions, had become the insignia for incompetence. The slander was ill-deserved, for, as history has recorded in a hundred fights, the Generals and Staffs of Divisions and Brigades did not flinch from incurring the heat of battle with the troops entrusted to their charge. Nevertheless, their military wisdom was daily impugned because those who fought the battles were asked to carry out tasks beyond human and military possibility, and which to intelligent men were often fantastic and absurd.

In self-defence, for the Staffs were not unaware of this sullen criticism, they, especially the younger, sometimes adopted an air of patronage and of superior wisdom. In effect they would


say, "My dear old boy, I've just come from a conference. All the High Command was present. Secret and confidential and all that. Sorry I can't give you the details. You see, there is to be a wide turning movement against Bulgaria, and we are asked to relieve pressure in order to enable the Rumanians to effect a junction with the Salonika Force and thus separate Turkey from its European ally. That will bring the War to a close, old boy." And so we wallowed in mud, and, if not shot down by German machine-guns posted in concrete strongholds, were drowned in shell-holes filled with poisoned water.

It was with such reflections that the sentiment and intelligence of man were often burdened as with the darkness of night, or grimly looking towards the dawn, he trudged the miles which separated some kind of civilized community of men from his battle post.

We return to the battle.

The struggle for the possession of Inverness Copse had continued with great violence. The wood had been captured, but the enemy succeeded in retaking it, and threw back our line on to the Stirling Castle Ridge. The attack for the 20th had been admirably planned, the troops for the assault lying in readiness well in front of the Ridge, in what had been the enemy's line. At "zero hour" troops of the Northumberland and Durhams swept forward with great violence and courage; and, suffering very few casualties, overwhelmed the machine-gun posts in Inverness Copse, bayoneting the German gunners at their posts, driving through to the eastern side of the wood which was their first objective. They consolidated the line to the east of it, on the edge of the boggy morasses, over which it was extremely difficult to pass. Moreover, the wide area of the Lakes was quite impassable. Before the assault could be continued, it was necessary to accomplish a wide turning movement. The troops for assault must be massed to the north-east of Inverness Copse, to permit them to sweep down to the south, past the northern extremity of the Lakes; and from this position assault the Tower Hamlets Ridge. Under cover of a smoke barrage this was done in little under an hour. The movement completed the first and second phases of the attack.

The position of my Machine-Gun Batteries lay in the middle of the German barrage line, and I suffered very heavy casualties, losing during the morning the officers commanding each one of my Companies and many valuable N.C.O's and men. The capture of Inverness Copse and the isolation of Dumbarton Lakes was a



complete success. Tower Hamlets Ridge to the south-east had been stormed and taken by London troops, and the ground to the north was now freed for the further assault upon Polygon Wood, the Reutelbecke, and Polderhoek Château.

My command was in an evil case. Having completed its rôle, which I have compared to that of Artillery, now depleted in men, and without tried commanders, we were to play a more important part as Infantry accompanying the assault. The men were exhausted.

During the height of the bombardment a young officer had been overcome with the most severe infliction of shell-shock which I had witnessed. Its symptoms were not unlike those of epilepsy. The eyes dilated and he foamed at the mouth, shrieking all the while, finally rushing in front of the guns towards the enemy. I called for fire to cease, and an N.C.O. ran out and overpowered him. The brain obviously was unhinged. He fought like a madman, and no muffling would subdue his cries. The effect on troops whose sensibility was already pulverized by heavy shelling and casualties would have been disastrous, especially since reserves were continually passing near the flank of the gun position. The lad was stunned and died during the night.

In the early days of the War prevailing medical opinion regarded every case of "shell shock" as one of malingering. Opinion changed as it was observed that the occurrence of functional disorders manifested itself in soldiers of proved courage and virility.

The term "shell shock" is misleading. Medical authority is agreed that among most of the cases defined for convenience as "shell shock" the nervous system of the soldier had not been impaired by physical concussion. The breakdown was due in most cases to long strain, both physical and moral, producing neurotic disorder.

It is interesting that Professor McDougall,¹ who during the War had long experience of such cases, records that "the officers were less liable than the private soldiers to disorder of the hysteric type, among the officers neurosis took most frequently neurasthenic form." In lay language, and as I observed it, "shell shock" among soldiers exhibited itself in madness, the mind unhinged, "disassociative." There were outward symptoms of foaming at the mouth, rigour of the limbs, staring eyes and violent passion, or weeping. With officers I observed repression, usually quite unlike the madness exhibited by the young officer

¹ *An Outline of Abnormal Psychology*, by William McDougall, F.R.S.

in this battle. I hazard the opinion that in this case the brain tissues had in fact suffered injury due to actual physical concussion, and the case was, therefore, rare. In a war of long duration Commanding Officers especially must be ever watchful for a weakening of the nervous system due to strain even in men of strong constitution. It requires some discernment to recognize the neurotic condition, to separate it from malingering.

While in the Ypres Salient an officer of virile type, with the Military Cross, sought my confidence, and told me frankly that he did not feel capable of taking his Company into action again, a confession most difficult to make. He stated frankly that as he did not feel sure of his self-control, rather than let his men and his Commanding Officer down he would throw his life away. With the fullest sympathy I sent him home with a medical recommendation that he be retained at home for training drafts for at least three months. He was reappointed to my Battalion by our joint request and served with distinction in the last stage of the campaign.

"Shell shock" is a phenomenon which is certain to appear and must be anticipated.

Whatever losses I had incurred, the orders to advance were clear and concise. The barrage position of the guns was to be moved forward, so soon as the Tower Hamlets Ridge had been gained, to the edge of Inverness Copse. This movement implied not only carrying the guns forward a further mile over territory ankle-, sometimes knee-deep in slush, but bringing up also a further half million rounds of ammunition to serve the guns for the coming fight. The task was probably the most arduous which those under my command were ever asked to perform. Under heavy fire, in which fresh casualties were sustained, by nightfall guns and ammunition had been placed in their new position, and sighted to fulfil the new barrage chart.

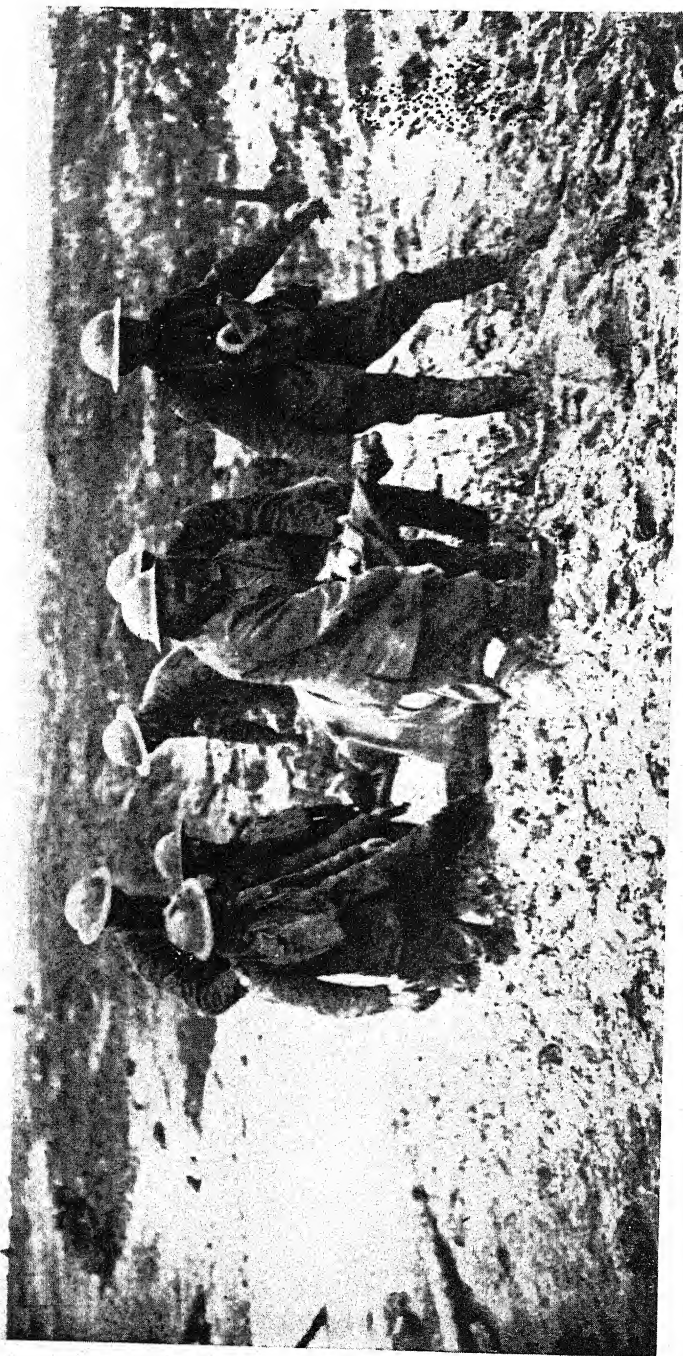
Such a barrage impels the utmost precision on the part of the Commander; and is a matter of mathematical delicacy for gun commanders. Having regard to the almost endless stream of bullets, death-dealing, delivered by each machine-gun, the slightest inaccuracy in the calculation of angle or time is fraught with the greatest danger to troops advancing under cover of machine-gun fire. This danger is the greater when it is remembered that the machine-gun, unlike artillery weapons, has no fixed platform, and the agitation of the gun in action, without a sure bed to the tripod legs, will cause it to lose elevation. Not only was it necessary in the short time available, therefore, to

bring guns and ammunition to their allotted station, but it was imperative to shore them up against sinking into the ground. My reserves had been used up, and there remained but half the numbers of my command, three men for each gun team. Of the four Companies at my disposal two were allocated to go forward with the first lines of the assault and two, with sixteen guns, to cover the Infantry with barrage fire from the edge of Inverness Copse.

In reply to my telegram announcing heavy casualties, during the night three reserve officers tumbled into my new headquarters, now posted on the lee-side of a derelict tank, one of whom was to take over command of one of the Companies destined for the assault. He was almost fresh from the Machine-Gun Training Centre at Grantham, and had never served before in the Ypres Salient.

The ferocity of the cannonade defied the senses. The British Batteries poured an incessant stream of shells overhead preparatory to the further attack on the morrow. The German artillery in titanic support of strong counter-attacks delivered by Bavarians hailed a most violent bombardment upon our support line and communications. So tremendous was the roar that its sound could clearly be heard in Boulogne, and even across the Channel in Kentish seaports and villages. The ground heaved and rocked. A tornado of earth clods and flying mud, splinters of timber, bricks and hot metal whistled all around. The swish and sigh of our own shells overhead was accompanied by unceasing crashes as the German shells thundered a gigantic defiance.

We lay beneath the storm waiting for the dawn at whose first gleam the attack of my own Division, which had come into line, was ordered. Short of responsible officers, my command of trained experts seriously reduced by casualties, and ever diminishing, during the night I appointed a Private Soldier who had already won the D.C.M. at Loos, a man of high intelligence and imperturbable pluck, to take command of one Company for the first assault. This man, yet a lad, who had served with me since 1914, due to the contrariness of military law, during my absence on leave had recently been reduced from the rank of sergeant, with the added imposition of "Ninety-one days' Field Punishment No. 1." The men, bewildered by the violence of the counter-bombardment rallied at once to his singular coolness, grasp of essentials, and rapid orders. They knew him already as a fearless leader. Now as the tactical Commander, N.C.O's and men alike rejoiced in his leadership.



BEARING WOUNDED ON A STRETCHER THROUGH MUD IN THE YPRES SALIENT

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Artist's Copyright

"RELIEFS AT DAWN"
From the painting by C. R. W. Nevinson.

A further Machine-Gun Company detached from its own Division had reported to me. The unit was fresh, its Commander eager. I took this Company heavily laden with ammunition and guns towards the Reutelbeeke in the hell of night, fortunately without loss. It was disposed in groups of four guns in an area almost free from fire, immediately behind the leading Companies of the 98th Brigade. The barrage batteries being positioned, there was yet time to dispose the remaining Company for the assault with the 100th Brigade.

The 2nd Worcestershires, the 9th H.L.I., and the 1st Queen's were lined out in readiness for the assault. I found the headquarters of the Worcestershires in a captured "pill box" and handed over the weakest section, already without officers, to the Commander. Almost as I left the headquarters an enormous shell burst directly upon it.

My Company Commander reeled against me. I threw an arm round him. My hand found a great rent in his back, the blood streaming from it. I called for stretcher bearers. No reply. The candlelight of the "pill box" was extinguished. I laid my companion upon the ground and ran to the "pill box." The Adjutant had been killed, together with the stretcher bearers. A candle was again lighted. The unbreakable reinforced concrete of the stronghold had bent and cracked beneath the impact. Corpses lay huddled in the doorway.

The Padre held a candle, his hand unshaken, and the same Padre with the same hand, six months later, surrounded by the enemy, defended a church against capture, throwing bombs from the verger's door.

I carried a bottle of spirit to my junior. He was conscious; a big man, heavily built, and of great strength. I raised and supported him to the "pill box." The candlelight showed a gaping wound gushing blood. The shoulder-blade was pulp, and field-glasses and case were embedded in the mess. There was no medical aid. We dared not remove them, but plugged the hole with fat shell dressings, great wads of antiseptic gauze.

"I'll go down the line now, sir," said my subordinate. "I'm a nuisance here." He rose to his feet and staggered out into the black hurricane.

How often were men torn between duty and friendship. Against the rules to take a wounded man down the line. He must wait for stretcher bearers, or chance the aid of a man slightly hurt to help him on his way. This wound was hideous. The man might survive. I doubted it. If I left him he would

bleed to death, and I loved his courageous, ever-cheerful self. I, of all men, could not take him. My duty was already fully overcharged. My lads had scattered to their rendez-vous. I could not leave him.

I slipped an arm round him and placed his around my shoulders. We floundered back, skirting the edge of Inverness Copse, on the rear side of which lay my barrage batteries. I talked incessantly, any rubbish, to cheer him and to give myself good heart, as the shells plunged and the hot metal hissed and whizzed by. He did not reply, just plugged on, breath coming in heavy gasps. The pace grew slower, his weight bowed upon me. I feared his collapse: then I should not be able to carry his weight.

"Sorry," he gasped, as he lurched and we nearly fell to our knees in the muck. I felt him strengthen, sheer indomitable will. I hulloaed to my batteries. My voice was lost in the shrieking maelstrom. Its fury had even increased, for the hour of dawn approached.

Two tidal waves seemed to meet over my head and burst against one another. In them I was engulfed, wafted, sucked, staggering on a pounded quicksand.

I came to a battery position suddenly. Quick hands took my burden, as the unquenchable spirit slipped to unconsciousness. Then I broke the rules. I sent two men from my perilously depleted force to carry my companion to the Aid Post. I could serve a gun myself.

I did not think to see him again. Two hours later the men returned. They told me that at the dressing station, where surgeons in shirt-sleeves were working like butchers, they had found the Commander's batman with a "Blighty one." The lad had taken possession of his master's body, and, too, of his unconscious spirit. They had pulled him round, and had sent him "down the line" carried by two stretcher bearers, the batman trotting by the head.

Months later, when on leave, my Company Commander with his fiancée took me to a box at the theatre. Then I learned how one of the stretcher bearers had been slain, how he himself had received a further shell wound in the leg. And how the batman, with a bone broken in the forearm, had taken the head of the stretcher, and unyielding had borne the great weight of his master's living body to the sanctuary of an ambulance. There the lad had fainted.

Let us now, who received their ready service, praise batmen.

At 3.30 a.m. just before dawn the extraordinary happened.

With outstanding gallantry the Germans attacked, two Divisions,¹ just as we ourselves were preparing to leap to the assault. Almost simultaneously both barrages lifted. The heavy bombardment sailed over my head to crash upon the communications and was replaced by a ferocious deluge of shrapnel and high explosive. "Zero hour," the time for action, had not yet arrived for my batteries. A comparatively clear view could be obtained across the Reutelbeeke Valley and up the opposing slopes.

I witnessed an astonishing sight. Dense masses of German troops were pouring down the hill-side against our Brigades waiting to assault. Suddenly the independent machine-gun company's batteries opened fire. The range was almost point-blank.

The Commander so skilfully directed the fire of his Company that, by holding it until the German officers, at the head of their troops, had topped the ridge and advanced down the forward slope, he could see the massed formation behind, coming over the ridge, as low down as the knee. As each mass advanced in this manner, he opened fire upon their ranks. The enemy was thus so far committed to the assault that he could not retire, but must advance. Low flying aeroplanes, however, soon detected the battery and both by machine-gun action and directing artillery fire upon the gunners the enemy inflicted very severe casualties among them. So heavily did this Company suffer that its Commander, who withdrew his Company in perfect order to a new position, was assisted only by his one surviving officer, who was badly wounded, and one N.C.O.

During the action the German counter-battery bombardment was so fierce that despite a preponderance in our favour, guns of all calibres being locked almost wheel to wheel along the whole front, and in several lines, our Artillery could appreciably be felt to grow weaker and weaker. Every form of communication had disappeared early in the day. The only possible means left was that of runners; but as it took a runner nearly three hours to reach the imagined front line from the Brigade Headquarters at "Tortops," the direction of the battle became an impossibility. It is not too much to say that the runners of all Battalions and formations were worthy of high award. It is indeed marvellous that any survived. Only supreme scout and shell craft and complete disregard of personal safety made communication in any way possible. It is improbable that any General knew what became of the troops he committed to battle

¹ 229th and 230th Reserve Infantry Regiments, 50th Reserve Division, Wytschaete Group, 4th German Army.

five minutes after he had seen them disappear into the cloud of gun smoke. Some of the platoons who were ordered forward in support of the shaken lines disappeared for ever.

The SOS signal was seen at every point along our lines. Our guns of all calibres and machine-guns immediately opened fire. Following this bombardment, the enemy attacked in massed formation upon our lines, no less than six Divisions being used in this attack upon our Divisional front. On the right the posts of the 1st Queen's were overwhelmed, the enemy debouching from the village of Gheluvelt armed with flame throwers. The stream of burning oil thrown from these devilish weapons reached a length of thirty yards and many feet in the air, and set fire to the trees, which being as dry as tinder immediately took fire.

I had already observed at the Hindenburg Line earlier in the year the gruesome effect of the *flammenwerfer* as a weapon of attack. Carried on the back of an infantry soldier it threw a stream of flaming spirit. This terrible apparatus could be brought up along covered ways, communicating the captured trench system with reserve lines, well known to the enemy, and was used as the first paralysing stroke to cover storm troops in their counter-attack upon exhausted troops. This was the rôle especially allotted to the *flammenwerfer gruppen* with Infantry. Defenders were saturated, their bodies being charred to cinders.

The men of the 1st Middlesex and the 93rd Highlanders on the left flank met the Bavarian wave with Lewis guns, bombs, and at the point of the bayonet. The resistance was insufficient and the attack swept on.

With such energy was the attack pressed that the whole of our line was thrown back. For some hours uncertainty prevailed. It was impossible to know the position of our own troops and in how far the German attack had penetrated. Commanders of all formations from those of Brigades, even down to Platoons, were out of touch with their commands and with their flanks. The enemy, possessed of the advantage of ground, seems to have been in no such dilemma, for the bombardment lifted, and, as it seemed, with an even greater ferocity smote our communications and every approach to the beleagured line. British batteries, which in the rear kept up a hurricane fire, from their deep formation, possessed of no new information, although themselves now under the heaviest shell-fire, brought down the barrage line with the object of stemming any further infiltration.

But though the German attack had overrun the Divisional right, and had made a deep impress upon its left, two Companies,

one of 1st Middlesex, the other of 93rd Highlanders, held their ground. This was the second occasion in one year upon which a Company of this Battalion of Highlanders had refused ground to an enemy counter-attack, and, true to its Balaclava tradition, had fought again as "The Thin Red Line." There were enemy in front and rear, and on both flanks. Neither Middlesex nor Highlanders were in touch with one another. Assaults, assisted by *flammenwerfer*, were again and again made upon these isolated posts embarrassing the German advance. The air was filled with bombs which continually hailed upon the positions; the defenders being obliged to husband their ammunition lest worse befall them. Not only did they become the continuous target for missiles of all kinds, but the aeroplanes, having disposed of the machine-gun batteries, turned their attention to these pockets which held up the progress of the counter-attack.

The plans for the original attack had now been abandoned, and until some definite news was received concerning the situation I ordered my batteries to cease fire and to recondition themselves for further action. We buried our dead, twenty-seven of them, in graves already prepared by shell bursts, marking each position with a rifle, thrust bayonet first into the ground, a steel helmet covering the butt, the common practice. The idle teams fell to the task of refilling ammunition belts and changing worn gun barrels for renewed action.

It was during this lull in the attack that a dishevelled signaller from Headquarters, penetrating the barrage, arrived at my headquarters. I tore open the sealed envelope to discover not the information which I sought as to the position of the advance, but an order that I should forthwith report the number of tins of plum jam consumed by the units under my command since my last report. This served to remind me that I had eaten nothing all day. The irony of the matter so struck me that I recommended the signaller for the receipt of a Military Medal for "conspicuous gallantry in the field whilst conveying messages under the heaviest bombardment." I believe, however, that on this occasion fortune did not attend my recommendation.

Late in the afternoon it was determined to renew the assault, for by now it was plain that the German counter-attack had been only partially successful, and it was thought that the enemy reserves would be weakened. Fresh troops from the Brigade in reserve, two Battalions of Scottish Rifles and one of Royal Fusiliers, came up platoon by platoon in shell formation, even so sustaining heavy losses during the earliest stages of the advance.

All day the enemy bombardment continued at the height of its fury. Beyond Polygon Wood the Australians, fresh troops, threw themselves to the assault. They stormed across the pitted ground, and as they advanced, taking numbers of prisoners, they reached the Companies of Middlesex and Argylls, who, sustaining their positions, had fought off eleven German attacks which had sought to oust them. So successful was the renewed drive through the posts where our Infantry had held the German attack that the supports were able to carry forward to the original Divisional objective. For one British Division the achievement of this battle was a notable feat of arms, contributing lustre, not alone to the Regimental records of those who had participated in it, but to the Salient in which British warriors had already set up new records in British chivalry and courage. Not only had we withstood the fierce attacks of superior forces, but overwhelming them, had carried all the objectives planned for our own assault.

So far as my own Division was concerned, for the moment, the battle was at an end. We had yet to withdraw guns, ammunition-boxes, and equipment. But at dawn, exhaustion possessed both sides and I was able to bring mules right up alongside the gun positions and load the material without further disturbance. Even a German aeroplane, which swooped down to examine the labour, flew on without a greeting of machine-gun fire.

I brought out of action but one-third of the men who had first rested beside the Lake at Dickebusch.

And the soldier, who as a private had commanded a Company in the assault, was awarded a Bar to the Distinguished Conduct Medal and a direct Commission in the field. I promoted him to the rank of Captain and he continued to lead the Company which he had so well commanded.

The stout-hearted resistance of the 25th, in which already the Division had sustained five thousand casualties, and the victorious attack on the 26th, in which all objectives were reached, was a triumph for all arms.

Sir Douglas Haig telegraphed to General Sir Herbert Plumer :

"From the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief, British Armies in France.

"To General Sir H. C. O. Plumer, Commanding 2nd Army, General Headquarters, 27th September, 1917.

"The ground gained by the 2nd Army yesterday, under your command, and the heavy losses inflicted on the enemy in the course of the day, constitute a complete defeat of the German

forces opposed to you. Please convey to all Corps and Divisions engaged my heartiest congratulations, and especially to the 33rd Division, whose successful attack, following a day of hard fighting, is deserving of all praise."

"From Xth Corps.

"To 33rd Division. G.G. 131.

26th September, 1917.

"Following received from General Plumer: Please accept my congratulations on success of to-day's operations, and convey them to the troops engaged. The 33rd Division have done fine work under extraordinarily difficult circumstances, and the 39th Division have carried out their task most successfully. The Corps Commander adds his own congratulations."

"In circulating the above messages I wish to congratulate all Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and men of the Division on having gained by their fine fighting qualities, such marks of appreciation from the Commander-in-Chief, and from the Army and Corps Commanders.

"Captured enemy documents show what efforts the enemy made on the 25th September, 1917, against the front held by the Division between the Ypres-Menin Road and the Southern edge of the Polygon Wood.

"I wish this Order to be read on parade to all ranks of the Division, as a mark of my appreciation of their gallant conduct in the past, and as a proof of my confidence in their being able to maintain their high reputation in the future.

"(Signed) P. Wood,

"Major-General,

"Commanding 33rd Division.

September 29th, 1917."

In the Battle of Arras, from my observation point overlooking Fontaine les Croisilles, I had been suspicious of the burdens carried by German stretcher bearers. Through field-glasses I had examined the loads with meticulous care. The platform of the German heavy-pattern machine-gun could be laid flat with hand-holds at the extremities. These projecting holds became feet to the platform mounted for action. The loads which I observed were machine-guns being carried to new positions. A man bearing at the head and at the foot of the platform with a lump in the middle produced an appearance similar to that of stretcher bearers carrying a wounded man. Except at close range it was impossible to determine the difference, especially when machine-

guns were camouflaged by a blanket thrown across the gun and platform.

We were, therefore, very properly suspicious of such parties, and possessed in our experience good reason to believe that sometimes the enemy were not over scrupulous in the loads carried by men protected by the insignia of the Red Cross and therefore by the Geneva Convention. Resulting from such suspicions, coming to the Ypres battle in the same year, we were watchful for any breach of the Convention. As a result of some misunderstood information obtained from prisoners taken by the enemy during the counter-attack, some correspondence took place through the neutral Netherlands and Swiss Legations, between the British and German Governments.

It is an interesting sidelight of the influence of the behaviour of the Warrior upon Government directing grand strategy.

Translation.

(215118/318/T.)

III a 20043.

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NOTE VERBALE

"According to information from British prisoners the order has been given to the British 1st Middlesex Regiment, 19th Brigade, 33rd Division, to shoot any armed German stretcher-bearer falling into British hands. Even a revolver carried by the stretcher-bearer is considered as armament.

"This order is at variance with the provisions of Article 6 of the Geneva Convention of July 6th, 1906, according to which, medical units are to be respected and protected by the belligerents, and with Article 8 (1) of the Convention, according to which the protection guaranteed by Article 6 is not to be forfeited by the personnel of the unit being armed and using its arms for its own defence or for that of the sick and wounded under its charge.

"The German Government therefore enters the most energetic protest against this order given in contravention of International law by responsible British Commanders, and expects the British Governments as soon as it learns the foregoing to cause the order to be repealed at once.

"Should a satisfactory reply not reach the German Government by the 10th December next it would be obliged to proceed to suitable retaliatory measures.

"The Foreign Office would be grateful to the Swiss Legation

if it would kindly cause the foregoing to be brought by telegraph through the intermediary of the Swiss Legation in London, to the knowledge of the British Government, and the latter's reply to be communicated to it by telegraph also.

"Copy of the note verbale is being sent to the Netherland Legation (British Division) in this City.

"BERLIN,

November 6th, 1917."

"TO THE SWISS LEGATION,

"(German Interests).

IMMEDIATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

121/2/134. M.I.6.L.

6th December, 1917.

"SIR,

"In reply to your letter No. 215875/318/1917/T. 12th November, 1917, and subsequent correspondence regarding the German allegation that orders were given to the First Middlesex Regiment to shoot any armed German stretcher-bearer falling into British hands, I am commanded by the Army Council to forward, for the information of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, copies of a letter addressed by the Field-Marshal Commander-in-Chief in France to the War Office and of a Report from the Officer Commanding the First Middlesex Regiment, in which an absolute denial is made of the German allegation.

"I am to request that Mr. Balfour will communicate this reply to M. Carlin for transmission to the German Government.

"I am, Sir,

"Your obedient Servant,

"(Signed) B. B. CUBITT

"THE UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE,

"Foreign Office, S.W.1."

The Division, passing through this ordeal of battle, had incurred over 6000 casualties ; and it was withdrawn to billets in and around Bailleul for a few days rest preparatory to taking over a line east of the Messines Ridge. Our entrenchments lay on the forward slope of the Ridge, the support lines being much exposed, while those in front were almost waterlogged. On this ground had been fought the swift short battle which stands out probably as one of the supreme tactical successes for British arms on the Western Front—Messines. General Plumer, commanding the 2nd Army, for so long the chief watchman of the Ypres Salient, was responsible for this notable success in June 1917.

The short weeks spent in this sector prior to being moved north-east for the winter in the mud fastnesses of Passchendaele proved later to have been of exceptional value. The Messines front following Third Ypres was quiet and uneventful. Behind lay Mount Kemmel, the villages of Neuve Eglise, Meteren and the town of Bailleul; while thickly clustered in the area between Flêtre, Westoutre, Locre, and Wulverghem, were the bivouacs for troops in rest, encampments of Nissen huts, dumps of material and of ammunition, Artillery emplacements, indeed a warren of warriors' habitations. It was amid these villages and hutments that the Division was called upon within six months to stem the tide of the great German offensive. Familiarity with ground proved to be of immense value, not only in the making use of prepared positions, but in playing hide-and-seek, also, with German snipers and the "storm troops" engaged in infiltration tactics.

CHAPTER XII

PASSION DALE

OCTOBER—DECEMBER 1917

Pageantry of Passchendaele—Training for Armageddon—The lure of Passchendaele—Thought and sense in attack—The reason for Passchendaele—The fate of men left out—Chivalry in modern war—Religion—Its function in military organization—The Padre—Attitude of the Warrior.

Now we remember ; over here in Flanders—
(It isn't strange to think of You in Flanders)—
This hideous warfare seems to make things clear.
We never thought about You much in England—
But now that we are far away from England—
We have no doubts, we know that You are here.

Though we forgot You—You will not forget us—
We feel so sure that You will not forget us—
But stay with us until this dream is past.
And so we ask for courage, strength, and pardon—
Especially, I think, we ask for pardon—
And that You'll stand beside us to the last.¹

EVERY battle possessed its own peculiar Pageantry, but of them all the first was Third Ypres. Never was presented so superb a Pageant as "Third Ypres."

Here was stupendous spectacle, accompanied throughout by a Gargantuan symphony of sound. The thunderous roar of the guns exceeded pandemonium. The boom of cannon was accompanied by the ceaseless clang of metal, blasting masonry, and clattering against tree stumps.

It was as if giants beat ten thousand tomtoms, while raving fanatics smote all the instruments of death in wild disharmony.

Yet the steady beat of rhythmic uproar kept the feet of the players moving to an even thread. The chatter of machine-guns throbbed maniac melody to the peal of cannon.

Always, from somewhere out of the gloom, unseen voices

¹ From "Christ in Flanders," by L.W.

chanted "Water, give me water. For Christ's sake give me water"; and staccato voices shrieked through the night, "Hell! . . . Damn! . . . Blast! . . . God! . . . Kamerad! . . . Mein Gott! . . . Cries so often silenced in a gurgle as the player sank beneath the soggy slime, drawing a last breath of gas, with oxygen twice laden with hydrogen. The urgent plea for water at last fulfilled.

The dulcet notes of spinning metal, and the hissing of spent bullets, made known their plaintive wail, accentuated against the din of gunfire.

The deep bass from the voice of active man commanding was carried away amidst the bellowing, the slightest variation of intonation producing a new ear-splitting note. The stricken commander, lying somewhere beyond human aid in a shell-hole, wailed piteously above the storm—"Give me water!" And though his voice, and that of hundreds more, pierced the uproar, it came from a region unseen and undiscoverable. The whirring of aero-engines above, the tearing of the sticks of timber, once trees, added a fresh plane of note-sound to break and confuse the whipping melody of rifle-fire.

One sound alone for each man beat with deafening certainty, a heart knocking in a wheezing throat.

The solemn procession of men, mules, and horses, of wagons, limbers, and crazy two-wheeled carts, man-hauled, streamed ever eastwards across the broken tracks. Sometimes the columns checked to make way for an ambulance. Then men would lie, or sit, or squat just where they stood, from sheer fatigue. Or again, the columns would sway and stagger as some gust of shell-fire smote the track taking more, as if by design and appointment, to swell the chanting chorus of the wounded.

And in the forefront of the Pageant the players rolled and staggered through deep pits suffused with barbed wire, cursing the Universe, muttering incoherent refrain.

"O give 'em Hell! . . . My rifle's jammed! . . .

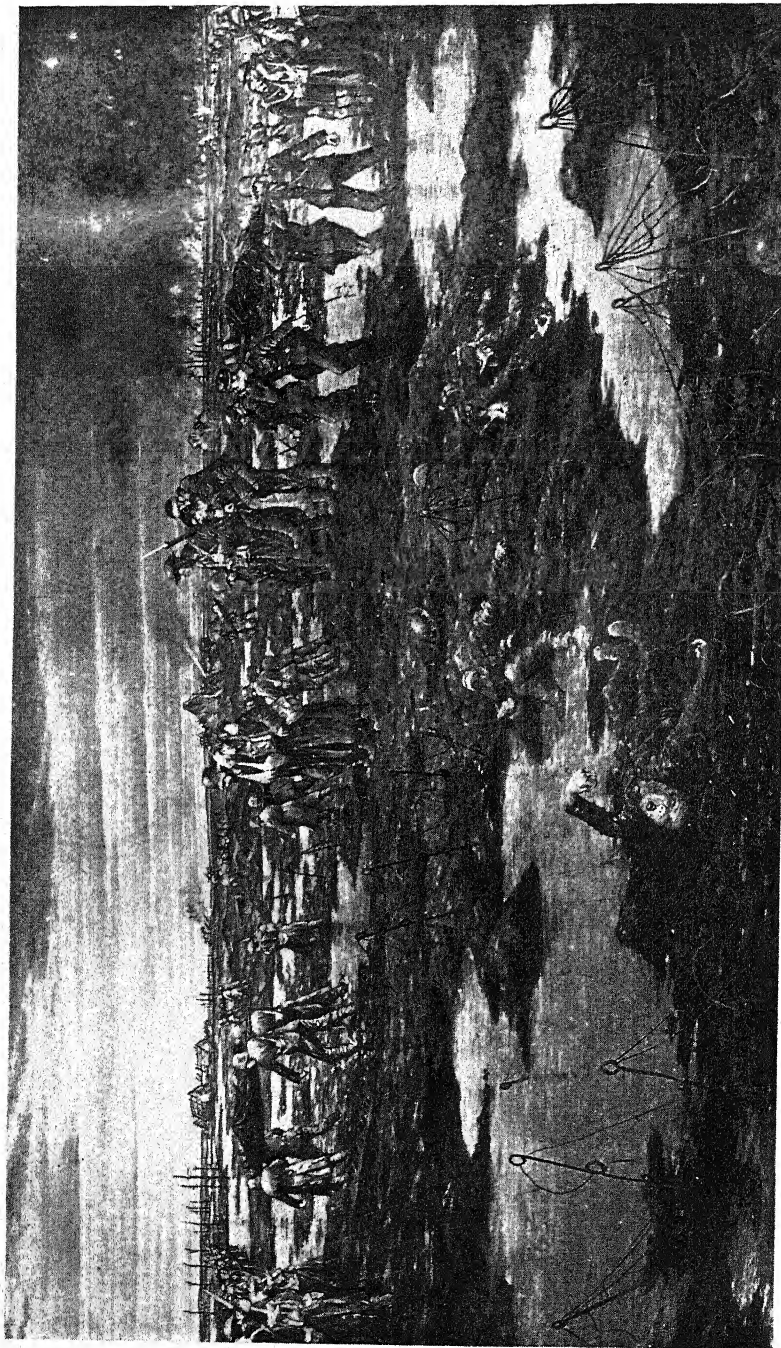
"Blast this mud! They'll come in a jiffy. The swine, the Boches, the Huns!"

And on the other side they whispered hoarsely "*Sie Kommen!*"

"Two red rockets gone up on th' right!"

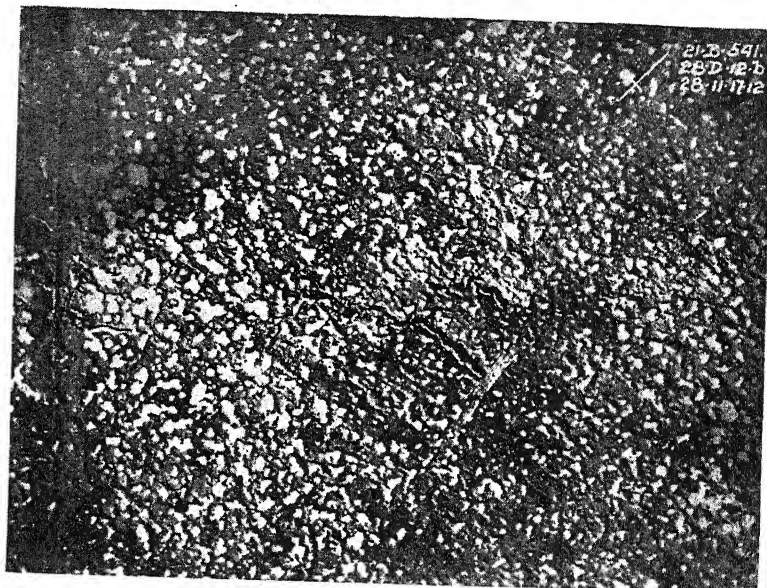
Echo—"For Christ's sake, water, water."

The Warrior wipes his rifle and presses a new clip into the breach. "Strafe it!" he shrieks, looking to the east. "Gerry's coming!" He raises his rifle, firing feverishly. Then the ground upheaves beneath him, and his body describes a wide parabola,



Artist's Copyright

"THE HARVEST OF BATTLE"
From the painting by C. R. W. Newinson.



AEROPLANE PHOTOGRAPH OF THE FRONT POSTS AT PASSCHENDAELE A *

The trench line and posts are distinctly seen amid a waste of waterlogged shell-holes. Against the shadow of the trench can be seen the gleaming pin-prick tops of steel helmets. Undoubtedly a Sector of the British line of the most hideous reputation.



A SNAPSHOT, LOOKING ACROSS THE SAME GROUND AS THAT A *
DEPICTED ABOVE

The dark mound on the horizon is what remained of Passchendaele church in December 1917.

one limb still clutching the rifle torn from the torso as it is hurled through the air. The body falls beside another, muttering as he works the rifle bolt, "Hell, I'll give 'em Hell!" And the fallen body takes up the chant "Water, water."

The pale light of an evil day through dust and smoke of battle reveals the marching columns, as they move eastwards, broken into tiny groups, finally lost in haze, single men stumbling, wallowing, muttering, chanting.

The curtain of night comes down. The sky behind becomes jagged with the quick-cut flash of bursting cordite, and red and luminous gashed by gun-fire. To the east the horizon is lit as by the banked furnace of a steam train tearing madly backwards and forwards along the battle front. It glows brightly, belching smoke, black against the blue night, punctured ever with sparks.

The realism of the theatre is found in soaring rockets, red and green and white. The first call for Artillery, as if the guns had ever ceased their attempt to drown the mutterings and chantings. The green lights declare the position of the Warriors, and the white shed a soft light that the audience may behold the scene.

Here is drama and pathos, pageantry supreme. A production which for every minute of its endurance costs hundreds of thousands of pounds, with always fresh performers entering the arena from the wings. Refrain unmatched. Dialogue which for sheer expressiveness outrivals poetry and prose.

Literally it beats the band. And never was such an Orchestra.

When the astonishing grandeur of the battle pageant is considered, how monstrous appears the prelude of the training camp. The pageant itself with its crowds marching to the east, its stupendous ballet of flying limbs, its impressive chorus chanting the hymn of the wounded and its world shaking orchestration. And man, a Lilliputian figure in earth's upheaval, with heart thumping in his throat, projected into the unknown. Alone. Lost. Unflinchingly courageous.

And then the prelude of the training camp. Aimless marchings. Chaotic marshalling to the whim of some witless N.C.O. Bullies too, yelling illiterate unanswerable personal abuses. "You, you little swine. I'll learn yer." A thousand meaty fellows, without the humours of the circus, shouted "We're lion-tamers 'ere!" while volunteers, young men glowing with the first flush of patriotic pride, and older men already carrying responsibility, were harried and pushed, marching, counter-marching, in fulfilment of some ill-tempered whim. They were mocked and

reviled by "staff blokes" glued like limpets to what were known as "cushy jobs."

"Temorrer 'is Majesty the King, Gawd bless 'im, will inspect the Division. And when the orficer ses 'Eyes Right,' you'll look 'is Majesty the King, Gawd bless 'im, strite in the face."

"'Ere you, Number Foer, what cher larfin' at?" yells the meaty one disturbed in the peroration which crowns his life's work.

"O, er, nothing sergeant," replies the youth, rigid as a statue. "Just the way you said 'His Majesty the King. God bless him.'"

"Oh! you were, were you? Well, you take three days C.B. and you wont see the blinking old blank at all!"

Fit dialogue for the prelude to the pageant of Passchendaele. No wonder the Warrior hated. Eternally in the minds of men ignorant of war and its usages, the prelude was thought to be the fitting theme to the Entry of the Gladiators. But training for the battle had little to do with battle itself.

Of each new draft of machine-gunners which was sent to my command I asked first their names, and made it my job to remember them, and then enquired what had been the civil occupation of each, and I could usually by some trick of memory connect the job with the name and face. I possessed then the common bond, the talisman to confidence. For the rest I said shortly, "Forget all you learned at the Depôt except mechanism." These men were to play a part in the pageant, to furnish that under-sound of throbbing, excited chatter from machine-guns, which mingled with the melody. I needed them to forget the strident discord of the training camps. At least this loathsome prelude must be lifted from the senses of those who chanted from the water-filled shell-holes the prayer of paradox, "Water. For Christ's sake give me water."

And I did find that even at the hour when the orchestra tuned its ranging shots, registering its key and harmony, I could write a fresh prelude on the hearts of men.

I have found a lad who with fear in his heart, stage fright, already sobbed for home; and I have sat with him alone in candle-light, in the narrow room of some abandoned farm-house reserved for me, or behind the sacking screening my mud sanctuary, and have given him comfort and fresh courage. A hand-shake. Soft words. Emanations from one who had discovered happiness, and therefore knew not fear, to one whose spirit had been stampeded in the "Bull Ring."

Some philosopher has said, "If you will have a friend you must needs be one." And that is the art of leadership.

An army of fine quality cannot be led by 'blokes,' but by men who are first the students of friendship. The battle pageant needs human skill in its direction lest the motif be lost in the swelling pandemonium.

"Indestructible cohesion, best of all qualities which an armed body can possess, is based not alone upon hereditary resolution, but on mutual confidence and respect."¹

I grew to love the Passchendaele Salient. The eeriness of the bleeding landscape haunted me. Seemingly endless miles of rotting lifeless life, lying crazily in seemingly endless stagnant pools. Danger, deadly danger was always present, dogging the footsteps, and ahead. On either side death lurked tugging at the elbow, luring the unwary to the pools from which wayed skeleton fingers, beckoning. And death shrieked suddenly from on high, breathing fire and gas and molten metal, and roared his laughter in great gusts as man ran and ducked and swayed and bobbed, eluding laughter, mocking the vale of tears.

I could stumble and glissade for hours across those trackless wastes, always finding something surprising, each day choosing a different path between my scattered posts. Duty, bravado, the desire to snap my fingers again and again in Death's face, contemptuously to kick the sweeping scythe aside, sent me daily on my giddy tramp across the Salient.

Dodging the wheels of swaying limbers, evading plunging mules and horses as I plodded the road scuppers through Potijze to Zonnebeke. Then turning aside I went north-east, following the sleeper track which led to the battery positions behind Tyne Cotts Pill-box on its eminence. The great baulks of timber squelched and heaved upon the morass beneath. Some like the headstones in a graveyard stood on end mocking and marking the deathbed of a mule and his hapless driver. The night would yet be dark. Then feet, long accustomed to stealthy movement after dusk, instinctively groped, finding each firm step, discarding the place of treachery. I walked quickly. The night air was chilled, and it was hot with bursting cordite. I hurried for both reasons.

At Tyne Cotts I would dive through the soaking heavy blanket and descend to flickering light bound by solid concrete. Great shadows fluttered on the roof and walls. The air was stuffy with coke fumes, soggy clothing, and unwashed humanity. It smote me unpleasantly as I came from the freshness of the

¹ *The Science of War*, by Col. G. F. R. Henderson, C.B.

night air, albeit tainted with the fumes of gas and rotting corpses.

There were bunks of wire netting stretched on timber upon which lay figures breathing heavily, one snoring. Before a rude table, casting shadows, sat two officers, a map before them. They would look up wearily, smiling wanly. A week, maybe a few days more or less, of that waste made men heavy-eyed. They slept little and intermittently. The eyes were seared with blood, dim and discoloured with mustard gas. They were unshaven, haggard, grey-faced, grimy ; clothing stained, encrusted with drying yellow mud.

Thus was the portrait of the Passchendaele soldier. He lived unbelievably as it were upon the outer crust of a honeycomb, its honey putrid water. Each death pool was separated from its neighbour by a foot or two of muddy cone. To the sides of the greasy, slithering edge, huddled above the stinking water, with bodies bowed beneath the crest, men lived out their days and nights, swept by shell and machine-gun fire, soaked in gas. When stormed by phosgene, its sickly, pear-perfumed stench dulling the senses, almost men ignored its delayed horrors. Then as maniacs, gripped by poison, they would hurry to the posts of battle civilization, the Canteen and the Aid Post. There they would stagger, as the quickened blood diffused the phosgene poisons through the system ; and sink down, a stick of chocolate or a cigarette between the lips, coughing, retching. Dying. Gassed.

And there beyond barbarity men clung to their posts. What purposeless futility ! I loved the Calvary of Passchendaele. It lured me.

From Tyne Cotts I would wander towards Broodseinde Ridge, and thence north as dawn broke along the front of my posts, so difficult to discover. I liked to see my men at daybreak and give them some word of good cheer. And they liked to see me.

Sometimes a sniper would pot at my wandering figure. I would amble quickly then over the maze of the cone, and drop from view beside a hole, worm my bellied way to another point, rise and shake my fist at the Boche, and pay another call. I ended my journey along the frontal posts usually at Passchendaele church.

In the stillness of dawn I could sink with fatigue in reverie, even as one may doze over a log fire, to be recalled by the crack of a bullet, just as a pine log spits and brings the dreamer to reality. The church had been razed to the ground. My post lay among its gathered bricks rebuilt above a vault, which served as sanctuary for the troops holding the eastern apex of the Salient.

They always gave me a cup of tea at the church, thus expressing the benevolence of Christianity. Men drank anything hot with gratitude. Even water, heavily chlorinated to its purification, so maddening to the palate, if hot sufficed. The flavour of tea and sugar imparted qualities in that hour which priceless Pekoe never yet possessed. Given by friends, Worcestershires.

Then, covered from direct fire, I would tour my other posts, disposed in depth to rake the valleys with fire lest the German High Command be seized with madness, and should seek to recover the cemetery of hope.

Even in December, for what purpose no god can know, we were ordered to carry out strong assaults across ground physically impassable against concrete machine-gun posts, fortified islands rising above the quagmire.

I recall the mood and how curious were my sensations and feelings in one such effort eastwards.

I go on through the darkness. My eyes have learned to penetrate its blinding blackness.

Shapes and forms appear and disappear. I heed them not. Some are tree stumps and holes, corpses and carcasses. They are still. I realize their attitude and manner.

Others move, figures like myself, hurrying, groping, stumbling, slipping. Going on. Some lurch against me if we pass. Of what use a greeting or a curse? It must be shouted to be heard, and then either becomes absurd. We go our way, deafened, yet the ear pierced always with the chant of "No Man's Land": "Stretcher Bearer! . . . Give me water."

The legs carry the body mechanically; the brain knows the body's destination. On. If no metal strikes me I shall blunder on. The mind wanders. What dreariness, what boredom, even when the ground heaves suddenly before the eyes leaving a yawning hole to trap the unwary foot and drag the body, and the earth shrieks and belches above the tempest.

Time and reason—both have ceased. They are insignificant, inexplicable. Only the earth shudders and hate justifies itself in staggering noise. Little lights soar into the air, tremulously, like children's fireworks. They do not break the blackness, illumine only themselves as with a halo. All days are the same, all nights. But each night is for itself distinct.

The earth, the heavens, the body, the spirit closes in upon the self, the living-dead-thing which goes on and on and on. It perspires: the beads of sweat grow cold in chill wind. I am neither hot nor cold. I am nothing.

Yet last week, or perhaps five months ago—what a mockery is time in relation to the senses—I saw the sun steal in from behind the blinds and light soft linen in a bedroom, and the darkness of night was tender and quiet. My mother crept into the room to peep at her boy as she had done when I was a little fellow. I lay on my side gazing at the familiar furnishings and pictures on the walls, whose shapes and forms I knew and could decorate and colour. And I heard the door handle turn and closed my eyes feigning sleep, with its deep regular breathing. She held a candle, its light shielded by one hand, and looked at me, then so gently touched the hair on my brow with her lips and turned and went out. I dared not look at her bent figure, but heard her slippered feet padding quietly over the carpet. How sweet to have died then.

The candle resembled that Very light hovering above the next horizon, very faint with its own halo. My boots squelch hideously in the morass, so different from moccasins upon a deep pile. A dream. Perhaps it was not true. There is no truth but I and my thoughts.

I go on. Time is nothing. And space? I do not know. The lights are nearer.

Death stalks closer. He no longer leaps and bounds in wild, haphazard ecstasy. His is now a heavy, steady tread marching across my path. I heed him not. I go on.

I may wake to find the sun streaming past a blind. The lights have gone, as my mother's candle was shut out by a closed door.

I close my eyes as death stares down upon me, and I feel his breath upon my head, a caress. But he did not kiss me. His footsteps are going away now.

I have killed and killed again. The machine-gun, miraculously carried and mounted, spouted fire. Black figures looming in front pitched headlong into holes, splashing, gulping as they fell. Bombs have been tossed at other shapeless shapes lurking and bobbing beyond: they, too, have melted into the landscape, shrieking until slime stifled sound. I have stabbed, trodden faces and bodies more deeply into the mud. Death has passed on to throw a curse and gob upon newcomers, dance with them, kiss.

My God! What weariness. No need to go on. The brain commands a halt.

I shall sleep now. "Mother!" someone calls. My eyelids hang heavily and refuse to lift themselves. Who will peep at me? I do not know. I am tired. I must give myself to sleep.

Perhaps death will come again to seek the passion of a kiss deferred. Who knows? I do not care.

It is comforting in the trench bed. I gather its clothes about me. Sacking, an abandoned overcoat, and the still warm pillow of a corpse.

The sun, a pale mockery of its bright self, seen through dust and smoke, illumines the unfamiliarity of the bed chamber: furnishings of bombs and ammunition boxes, for pictures the battered skulls of men, open mouths flecked with bloody foam, blind staring eyes. The light peeps from behind baulks of timber, above the ledge of mud. The coverlet is grey, stained red.

No ugly dream, no nightmare this. No sudden madness. Awful ghastly sanity. "Stand to!"

At this distance from the events recorded, with the evidence of history,¹ and all the diaries and apologues of generals and statesmen available, it is with pain that I record the futile heroism of Third Ypres and Passchendaele. A boisterous publicity informed those who were sent into these muddy wastes that the need of the offensive was urgent in order to withdraw German pressure from the French.

True it is that earlier in the year France had lost 120,000 men in the twinkling of an eye in Nivelle's fantastic attack at the Chemin-des-Dames, and the French Armies had mutinied. But both Pétain and Foch had exerted themselves to dissuade Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson from their purpose before Ypres. "What is the use," they had asked in effect, "of a duck swim through the inundations?" Surely a warning. And it is recorded that an officer from G.H.Q., who persistently had urged Haig's offensive, in November, for the first time since its opening visited the front, and wept, crying: "To think that we asked men to fight in that!"

And Foch had remarked:² "Boche is bad and *boue* is bad. But Boche and *boue* together . . . ah!" The French, indeed, had desired that Haig should extend the British front, until the French Army had been reorganized under a new command. But Haig had persisted in the Passchendaele pursuit.

Twice sacrificed within six months were the British Armies,

¹ *Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches.*

² *Foch. The Man of Orleans*, by Captain Liddell Hart. *World Crisis*, by the Rt. Hon. Winston Churchill.

Order of Battle, compare also Histories of Units and Formations which served in Passchendaele Salient, both British and German.

My War Memories, by General von Ludendorff.

Both Winston Churchill (*World Crisis*, 1931, page 715) and Captain Liddell Hart (*Foch. The Man of Orleans*, page 248) record this phrase.

thrown away at Passchendaele, overwhelmed in March 1918. There can be little room for doubt that the tardiness of Foch in coming to British aid in the Battle of the Lys was because Haig had defied the wishes of French G.H.Q. six months before.

It is certain that the menace of the German submarine campaign persuaded Haig and Robertson in the attempt to out-flank Zeebrugge and Ostend, by piercing the German line at Passchendaele, thereby throwing back the enemy's right flank to the line of the River Scheldt. But the Prime Minister, charged first with the responsibility for statecraft, holding the people's pulse, strenuously opposed the Passchendaele offensive. Yet Haig persisted. History is presented, therefore, with the spectacle of its greatest maritime power flinging its last military reserves into a death struggle with the world's greatest military power, while the under-sea naval force of that power tightened its grip on the throat of the adversary.

Plainly, statecraft and strategy dictated the waiting game. British troops would have been refreshed and reinforced by March 1918. The French Armies would have been reorganized, and inspired again under the leadership of new national heroes. America, having declared war in April, would have available its unblooded troops, with unlimited reserves, ready in co-operation with the Allies, as the counter-stroke, to throw back the cohorts of Ludendorff.

Though Third Ypres, with its ghastly aftermath of Passchendaele, remains a monument to the tenacity of British arms and to the courage of the Warrior, history condemns the High Command. We were ever willing to forgive a fault. In war, as von Clausewitz has written: "foolhardiness, even that is not to be despised." But the propaganda of trumpeted excuses have galled us, where frankness, as in Napoleon's armies, would have won our sympathy. *Qui s'excuse s'accuse.*

Raids, even more formidable attacks, carried out along a Corps' front opposite Passchendaele are lost and confused in a terrain, as a manœuvre area beyond cohesive plan, topographically absurd, pock-marked by shell-holes, each one interlacing its neighbour, so that from the air the battlefield resembled a honeycomb.

We attacked the "Gasometers," and a variety of German strongholds, set in concrete, held by a score of men armed with machine-guns and flame-throwers. These concrete fortresses, rising above the mud and slime, squat like the old defences of Portsmouth set in the Solent, were well-nigh impregnable. Though

British military policy exposed large numbers of men to shell-fire, gas, and the incredibly horrible weather conditions of the front defences of Passchendaele, the men being strung out, devoid of shelter in waterlogged shell-holes crudely linked by the spade, the German defences were but thinly held, and consisted of concrete "Pill-boxes" held by machine-guns, the main body of the troops being retained in reserve, well housed and rationed, considerably behind the battle front.

A knowledge of the ground made it plain that no major attack could develop over it without ample signs of preparation, and that any advance over ground of the character described must be very slow. An attack, either by British or by Germans, by day or by night, could be held for some hours by machine-guns placed in depth, fired from strongholds, indestructible, except by the rare possibility of direct hit by a shell of the largest calibre, or by a surprise assault by troops possessed of extraordinary hardihood, ingenuity, and courage, armed with bombs or flame-throwers.

The massing of British troops in and around Passchendaele was sheer waste of life and man-power, and wholly destructive of morale. Attacks sent forward were almost inevitably doomed to failure at high cost, and even if successful achieved nothing of tactical value. It is true that several Divisions occupying this front during the winter of 1917-18 achieved local successes by the capture of German "Pill-boxes." But the aftermath of horror beggars description. Wounded men, lost in the trackless undulations of "No Man's Land," cried bitterly by day and night from the shell-holes into which they had fallen, or into whose depths they had rolled for safety from machine-gun fire, until death stifled their cries, as weakened they subsided deeper into the slime or were drowned in the stagnant, gas-drenched water-holes. By day, owing to the vigilance of the enemy, it was impossible to search the ground; and, by night, the difficulty of maintaining direction, due to the straggle of our forward posts, and the confusion caused by light rockets appearing from every angle, made it impossible to succour the men left out in "No Man's Land." In and around our posts, indeed, throughout the Passchendaele Salient, there were scarcely ten square yards from out of the waters of whose shell-holes there did not protrude an arm, a leg, or a helmeted head, some German, but mostly British. As loss of blood and faintness from wounds weakened and sapped their strength, and the intense cold cramped their limbs, the mud sides of the shell-holes declared how these

men had slowly sunk lower and lower, until death surrendered them to a slimy grave. Such death, sketched on every hand, indeed, was the real horror of Passchendaele. The cry of lost, helpless souls in "No Man's Land" was the bitterest experience which fell to the Warrior's ears. It chilled his heart, froze the marrow in his bones.

I had heard those cries in the narrow stretch which lay between our lines at La Bassée, where it was suicide to attempt to bring the wounded in. And at Les Bœufs and in Third Ypres I had heard them, too. But the wanton futility of Passchendaele gave to those cries an added bitterness.

I never permitted a man to move at Passchendaele alone. And though Passchendaele held a strange fascination for me I was so fearful of being struck down and left to cry alone in that wilderness, that on my perambulations I always took with me some stout heart, in case one or both were stricken. Then, at least in comradeship we might die, if aid did not come. But so treacherous was the earth's surface, so binding to the feet and legs, that one man alone, however great his strength, was incapable of carrying a wounded comrade. If he left him, while seeking aid, it was a miracle if in the holes of that honeycomb he found his way back again to the place where his comrade had been left.

History must write of Passchendaele that it remains a military crime, a complete misunderstanding of ground, a misinterpretation of the quality of troops, and a misreading of the intentions of the enemy. No possible excuse, no extenuating circumstance, political, strategic, tactical, exists for the futilities of Passchendaele.

In how far wounded men left lying in between the lines can, or may be, aided is a point which International Law and agreement cannot decide. Even were it possible for jurists to agree on a formula, an interpretation in all the circumstances of battle would be liable to err on the side either of severity or clemency. In principle, men, with the exception of those working under the Red Cross, are forbidden to go to the rescue of wounded owing to the risks which they run in themselves becoming casualties. In practice, this ruling is often broken, men incurring grave risks in going out beyond the security of their own front to bring in wounded officers or a loved comrade, even in daylight, at the imminent risk of their own lives. On both the British and the German sides, the desire to save the life of wounded abandoned between the lines was extraordinarily strong. For example, the lives of half a dozen volunteers were sacrificed in



W
HIGH COURAGE AND ENTERPRISE, GREAT QUALITIES IN THE BRITISH SOLDIER

Private F. G. Dancox, a stolid old soldier who had served with the 4th Worcestershires throughout the War, wins the Victoria Cross at Poulcapelle, 9th October, 1917.
From the drawing by Gilbert Holiday.



THE ATTACK FAILED

a vain attempt to bring in the body of the commander of the Cameronians at Les Bœufs. After Neuve Chapelle, and following the failure before Gommecourt, in both of which battles great numbers of wounded were left out, heroic attempts were made to rescue them.

No man can tell what impulse of fear or revenge permits combatants to shoot down unarmed men obviously devoted to a task of mercy. The Boers in South Africa fired even on the Red Cross. On analysis, however, it may be pleaded that wounded men thus rescued, when restored to health, can again be put into the firing line as combatants. Permission to rescue wounded is, therefore, a means to extending the duration of resistance. In principle the objective of war is to destroy resistance by incapacitating the enemy. There are only two wholly satisfactory methods of so doing, firstly to kill him, and secondly to take him as a prisoner. The wounded, therefore, must inevitably suffer from the conditions which war imposes upon the combatants.

The days of chivalry are gone for ever. When lesser armies, fighting for the prestige and privilege of kings and princes, faced one another, those who fought the battles were but remotely concerned with the cause of quarrel. Before the encounter, even during the height of a pitched battle, there were occasions and moments for the display of chivalry, even elaborate courtesy, between the opposing commanders and the combatants themselves. In wars of the nations, the Warriors themselves are deeply imbued with the causes of quarrel, and in consequence an added ferocity is contributed to the fighting.

Nevertheless, although no law can govern the treatment and disposal of beleaguered wounded, there are recorded instances testifying to both valour and chivalrous forbearance in a free interpretation of humanitarianism in war and of the translation of mediæval custom applied to modern conditions. At Neuve Chapelle a British soldier went to the rescue of a wounded German officer caught in the wire and lying in front of the German parapet, and carried the body into the German lines. For the moment all fire ceased, and the German soldiery exposed themselves from their lines cheering this courageous deed, permitting the soldier to return to his own lines.

At Beaumont Hamel in 1916, dawn of the 2nd July, found a lad of the 4th Worcestershires tending a stricken wounded comrade close under the enemy line. The mist which had shielded him suddenly lifted, showing the German line only a few yards.

away. The enemy, the 121st (Wurtemberg) Regiment, levelled their rifles, but were checked by an officer, who stood up and shouted in English : " You must not stop there with that man. If you want to come in, come along : or else go back to your own trenches." The lad answered : " I'll go back to my own trenches, sir," and trudged back unhurt. Two stretcher bearers went out, protected by their Red Cross arm-bands, and brought the wounded man back to the British lines.¹

It could never, however, be permitted that there should be a general amnesty following a battle to permit wounded to be brought in. The risk incurred is too great. It is only too probable that advantage would be taken by one side or the other, under cover of the Red Cross, to reconnoitre the enemy position, to steal an advantage of ground, or even to conduct a surprise attack. This is only too evident.

The rules of war can generally be agreed in times of peace. It is, perhaps, fear of reprisals alone which makes them binding. They can cover only such general principles as conduct towards the civil population in an occupied zone, the treatment of prisoners, the use of poisons and barbarous weapons, respect for hospitals administered under the Red Cross. What may happen to wounded men on the battlefield cannot be subject for legislation. Only can belligerents themselves do their utmost, without exposing combatants to the possibility of further loss, to bring back the wounded to hospitals that they may be rebuilt as combatants. That is the theory. Its practice may in exceptional cases provide for latitude and praiseworthy initiative. But once war has been proclaimed its object is the destruction of the opposing armed forces, and such destruction implies killing or capture.

The realization of the impossibility of exercising chivalry upon the modern battlefield opens to the mind avenues for speculation far more profound. Morality in its widest sense invites the student along its various avenues, and none less than the great highway of religion.

The fact that organized religion was conspicuous in the Army postulates the importance attached to religion by military leaders, if only due to tradition. The matter regarded objectively by the detached mind is of special interest. Aside from its spiritual quality, glowing religious faith is the bedrock upon which commanders may build morale. A strong religious basis to the Warrior's character, governing his behaviour, is a quality to which the commander can direct his appeal for the utmost

¹ *The Worcestershire Regiment in the Great War*, page 166.

heroism and self-abnegation in battle. Of such a nature was our behaviour, and to such a quality did Sir Douglas Haig address himself on the 14th April, 1918: "With backs to the wall, and believing in the justice of our cause. . . ."

Each Infantry Battalion, Artillery Battery, and other considerable formation, had allocated to it a chaplain. At Divisional Headquarters were senior chaplains of higher rank representing the varied denominations, as required, and so up the scale to the Chaplain's General. The appointment of padres in the field was not to placate demands through political channels for representation by organized religion. The merit of religion, as such, was recognized by the General Staff, in some cases upon strong personal grounds, but generally as an inspiring propagandist force.

Men required daily, even hourly, to surrender life for a cause, whose objects they can but vaguely appreciate, and whose political consequences they can neither foresee nor understand, unless atheistic or agnostic upon intellectual grounds, sorely need the spiritual strength which is derived from religion. Nature abhors a vacuum, and nowhere is this more manifest than in the organic intolerance of consciousness towards the voids of unreality. For *homo sapiens* there arises to fill this dreaded Unknown the beatific vision of Heaven, ruled by the generic "God," with His many understudies, Mediators, Prophets, Saints, gods of all the seasons, the arts, the crafts, the elements.

Man so close to the Unknown, which at the hands of Death may at any moment claim him, has need of the consolation of a known God, whose laws for behaviour in this mortal life he is prepared to accept, that his soul may be acceptable to that God beyond. With such consolation, believing in the mercy and benevolence of a God, while Death, God's Servant, frowns on "No Man's Land," men will without fear face the fury of the machine-gun storm, and offer their mortal lives to Death's convenience.

A religious sense in an army is, therefore, an additional assurance as to its moral quality. Selecting an extreme example, it is religious fanaticism which girds the Pathans to forsake their rocky fastnesses, and against a hail of bullets to charge down to Paradise. From such fanaticism and out of profound depths, too, have been borne the fighting qualities of Crusaders in Palestine, of "Roundheads" and "Cavaliers," of Dervishes at Omdurman, and of soldiers in almost all the wars of history. There have been notable exceptions, wherein ancient national

feuds, fanned to fever heat, have exploded in the fury of the battlefield. And among the exceptions was the Great War itself, though even here the fight, ethically, concerned an interpretation of right and wrong in International Agreement, itself obtaining sanction from the Throne of God. The political influence of this interpretation outweighed every other consideration both in the declarations of war, and in the conduct of subsequent propaganda.

Communism, too, can fight Capitalism with all the fanaticism of religious fervour.

Men in the mass will only fight for causes. Hence all wars ultimately involve the religious issue. Christianity has in it the element of the bidimensional, the note of bargain and arrangement which, maybe, essentially accounts for the strife in the Christian world, wherein war causations, be they political, religious, economic, or national, circle around "right." We were presented, therefore, in 1914, with a war in which the Christian nations of the world, supported by subordinate races or in concert with those merely gambling for high stakes, were pitted against one another for the purpose of interpreting the name of "right."

This dissension was sufficient to contribute to the belligerents on either side a cause for which to fight, although both invoked to their aid the same God and the same Mediator.

Since Christ insisted, "The Spirit is more than flesh," for the military purpose of sustaining and elevating morale, Christianity triumphs on the battlefield. Religion is a potent agency of regeneration and in this lies its utility for military needs.

These statements are those of objective analysis only, and herein questions of reverence do not arise.

There are, and always have been, in all armies, a majority of men of mediocre intellectual attainment, even of comparatively low standards of intelligence, men with little knowledge, incapable of subjecting the reasons for existence to any kind of analysis, to whom religion is the sheet anchor of all their moral qualities and strivings. It governs their behaviour in the ways of peace no less than upon the battlefield. But at war even this anchor is strained, and drags, for the demand of man upon it is unceasing. The chaplain can only ease the burden, if from out of his own personal experience, well equipped with knowledge of psychology and of superior intellect, possessed also of some qualities of leadership, he can speak to the soldier in terms which the soldier understands, of matters of which the soldier is but



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THE BOMBER, 1918

By "Snaffles."



THE SOLDIER SLEEPS

dimly aware, and can scarcely reason in his own inner consciousness.

Indeed, the task of the padre is set upon a high pedestal. There is little wonder, therefore, that so often his offices became perfunctory, and that, apart from his place in the structure of military organization, he has suffered much at the hands of the critics. These latter most often can little have understood the responsibility vested in the padre, and the difficulties which faced him in a mission, the very beginning of which was barred by the strength of man's spiritual fortress, itself founded upon common experience and understanding.

Thus, though even the severe hereditary and customary disciplines of a Church might demand confession, man, ignoring the padre, preferred to pour out his soul to a pal.

No kind of spiritual obedience, let alone exaltation, can be exacted by means of the "Parade Service." Man realizes no God the Father, discovers no Redeemer, receives no unction from the Holy Spirit, when being marched to church. Yet of all man's need in war the greatest are those of redemption of the spirit.

Before he goes over the top to face almost certain massacre, or chokes to death in a Casualty Clearing Station, deep down in him man is possessed of a burning passion to be at one with Him who reigns over the spirit's "No Man's Land." In man's sacrifice, he feels, has been taught to feel by every line and word of propaganda, that there is something in that surrender of the body akin to Calvary. But so few charged with the Divine mission spoke of a spiritual life, one here on earth no less than in a Heaven hereafter. And blinded too often by man's trivial faults and failings of the flesh, the padre did not see that each act of self-sacrificing comradeship was but the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace never so fully realized. Because he could not see, the padre failed to extend, bless, and beautify a comradeship, vibrant and dynamic, itself the very essence of Christianity.

CHAPTER XIII

"DAVID SLEW HIS TENS OF THOUSANDS"

APRIL 1918

German assault, spring 1918—Battle of the Lys—Training of Scouts—Panic—Filling a breach—Strategic and tactical importance of the Hoegenacker Ridge—A machine-gun action—"Backs to the wall"—The German Alpine Corps as the enemy—French troops join action—Several responsibility of statesmen and generals—Stand at Neuve Eglise—Decorations—Refugees—Causes of German failure—Developing superiority of fire-power—The machine-gun, supreme weapon—Influence of aeroplanes, gas and tanks—Tactical use of machine-guns.

WHERE Life, the Sower, stands,
Scattering the ages from his swinging hand

Thou waitest, Reaper lone,
Until the multitudinous grain hath grown ;

Scythe-bearer, when thy blade
Harvests my flesh, let me be unafraid !¹

DA—endlich die leuchtende Rugel stieg,
Der Himmel war blutig und rot ;
Auf !—Vorwärts Leiber !—Tod oder Sieg,
Der Führer rief's, fank—und war tot. . . .

Das war die blutige Kemmelschlacht,
Ost denk ich daran mit Bangen ;
Sie hatte uns glänzenden Sieg gebracht
Und dennoch :—Wir Sind gefangen.

Doch steigst du jemals den Berg hinan,
Du junges, du deutsches Blut ;
Ach ! Grüss mir die Toten : blick himmeln
Und bete—und lüste den Hut !²

WE remained at Passchendaele. On the 21st March the storm broke on the front of the 5th Army. The Division was withdrawn from the line and we were moved by bus and train to Lattre St. Quentin. Very little news

¹ From "Laus Mortis," by Frederic Lawrence Knowles.

² From "Der Sturm auf dem Kimmel !" Georg Heidel.

filtered through except that the enemy had made attacks upon a stupendous scale ; and rolling up the 4th and 5th Armies had almost broken our line and that of the French ; and was now advancing rapidly on the road to Paris.

We remained in our concentration area for two days ; but at 7 p.m. on the 10th April orders were received to proceed by tactical trains to the Cæstre area. My Battalion, divested of its transport, but with all the guns and ammunition boxes, was hurried into wagons behind a snorting engine. Near St. Pol, a great shell hit the train and killed forty of my men who were cooped up in one cattle wagon.

We detrained at Meteren at 10 p.m. on the 11th April. At 10.30 on the morning of the 12th, seated in a placid farm-house with my Battalion bivouacked in a pasture among cows and poultry, I received orders from Divisional Headquarters to make a reconnaissance. Taking three cyclist patrols, made up from my Scouts, I hurried due south of Meteren and to Oostersteene. Here large numbers of both wounded and unwounded men were in full retreat, I observed especially the men of one Division, pouches still filled with ammunition, who had not fired a shot, but were running away in the face of the enemy, lacking order and organization.

The military pattern of bicycle is both clumsy and heavy, but we pedalled laboriously farther on seeking the enemy. Half a mile farther I came suddenly into view of groups of the enemy pushing forward under covering fire, behind them flaming homesteads.

I rallied some straggling Infantry and lined them out on a five hundred yards front as a screen so that the Casualty Clearing Station at Oostersteene might be evacuated. And at the gates of the C.C.S. I commandeered a Ford ambulance, instructing the driver to take me back to Meteren. I recollect some qualm of conscience concerning this misuse of the Red Cross, but no Ford ever went faster. I reported to the Divisional Commander, suggesting that my guns should be rushed to fill the breach and that the Infantry should follow as soon as possible.

In Meteren there stood an A.S.C. motor-lorry column. I requested the use of a lorry, but the officer in charge refused it. I hit him on the head with the butt of my revolver, and instructed the driver, a bright young fellow who rendered yeoman assistance to the Division during the ensuing days, to drive off.

We halted at the farm-house, where I had installed my headquarters, and within a few minutes half a company of machine-gunners, guns, and ammunition complete, had been packed into

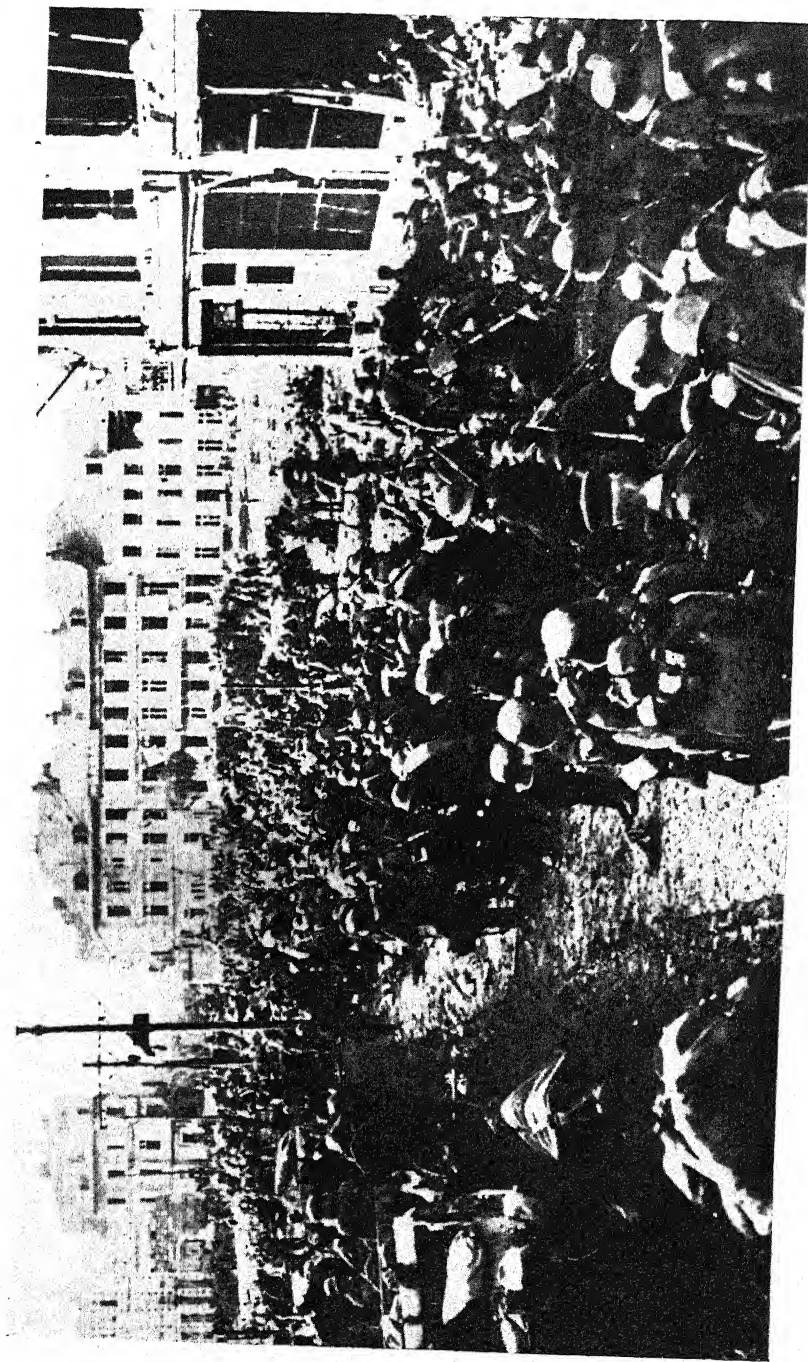
the lorry, while I myself, with my Adjutant, sat beside the driver at the wheel, revolvers in hand. We drove straight towards the Ridge on which stood the Hoegenacker Mill, which became the fulcrum of the fighting. On the way we surprised the advance-guard of the enemy in a ditch. From our seat beside the driver my Adjutant and I loosed off our revolvers and killed the gun crew, German storm troops, and captured their machine-gun.

Upon the Ridge which I had chosen as the line of defence, we came into contact with the Scouts whom I had left behind. They, in close combat, were conducting a rifle duel with the enemy.

Masses of British Infantry with grave disorder and often led on by their own officers, were retiring on to Meteren. At the revolver-point I halted one Battalion led in retreat by its Commanding Officer, ordering the men to turn about and occupy the Hoegenacker Ridge. Three times I gave my order and put it also into writing. The men refused to move. Finally I gave the officer, whose men said they would accept no order except through one of their own officers, two minutes in which to decide, with the alternative of being shot out of hand. At the end of those two minutes I struck him ; and the Regimental Sergeant-Major exclaimed, "That's what I've been waiting for all day, sir." He led the companies up to the Ridge, though they proved but a feeble defence and dwindled away during the following night.

I knew we were in for a bloody business. Everyone said so, and it was in the atmosphere. My command was largely new, a host of untried youngsters, lads of eighteen and nineteen. I am always grateful for these boys, and cursed myself eternally for what I had to teach them. But my job was to win the War. I had to deny myself the pleasure of appearing to be heroic before my men—and I imagine this must be a glorious intoxication—and go about my job organizing little groups into a sense of sanity, infusing courage by appealing to the manhood in men turned curs, threatening, cajoling, even shooting as a salutary lesson. And I had also to refuse the fun of shooting back at the enemy—and it is fun under war conditions—because the brains of my life were wanted to organize a front which was rapidly decomposing, if indeed it had not ceased to exist.

I had formed a little body of Battalion scouts and mounted orderlies, sixteen scouts and eight mounted orderlies. Not one of these was over twenty years of age. They were fresh, clean, bright-eyed, just little adventurers. They had no vices, no fears. They lived with me : where I went they went.



❖
"VORMARSCH"

German troops in Flanders advancing to the great offensive—"Michael Schlack"—April 1918.



"WITH BACKS TO THE WALL."
From a painting by the Author.

It was like a school-treat, with this difference, that it was my duty to harden their hearts to shocks, and spoil their minds to the sight and sound of death and bestiality—a face half shot off turned up to the sky is fearsome ; a man with his bowels torn out by high explosive makes a strong man sick ; an old corpse bloated and black is terrifying—so I had to make these lads coarse to stand the racket of things, which I loathed personally, and which I feared, too, lest the youngsters should weaken, when I needed most their confidence, and the power and inexperience of their youth, and their manhood.

I had seen by that time more than three years of war. The deliberate coarsening of the minds of lads by profanity and jibe, anything beastly so long as it neither hurt the brain like drink, nor the body like women, I used to steel these lads for the task which one day would come. I trained them diligently as scouts, and demanded their confidence and loyalty with every artifice of which a commander can make use, in order that in any part of a battlefield they should be my eyes telling me accurately what I must know without embroidery, but telling me also without an eye to the main chance—safety or glory. And I knew each one individually, just for what he was worth. I tested them—a walk here, ten minutes and a cigarette there ; the lad by himself as himself, not in the artificiality of the presence of a corporal, or their comrades—I needed them to do my will : I required their confidence, my external and internal spies, my intelligence corps, my scouts. Prior to Meteren, with a little weeding, I had proved them. Throughout the battle, I know without question that where my Scouts went, there I went myself.

The demands of leadership made great inroads into the feelings of the sensitive. The most profound thoughts are invaded, held at the pistol-point of expediency, forced to surrender to opportunity. The regimental soldier cannot by the very nature of his duties, day by day, adopt an iconoclastic attitude. Service in the British Army, more than any other, develops qualities and interests often latent in the young officer. Long months and years of isolation in command of a handful of men, administering a territory, watching a pass, or policing the bazaars of a city stimulate imagination, invite contemplation of the philosophies and the arts.

The minds of many leaders were rudely shaken by the ferocity and cruel necessity of war on the Western Front. Yet, discipline, itself the self-realization of a sense of form and order, in the hands of strong-willed men of high motives, in the hour of crisis

enabled good leadership to triumph over natural repugnance and to use the arts and philosophies as a sounding-board upon which to test each and every man entrusted to command.

I did not shrink from training these trusty Scouts, as the central fact, the unifying force in a scarcely united unit.

No one who has not witnessed it can possibly appreciate the sense of horror and shame conveyed by soldiers in panic. And when these are British soldiers witnessed by the eyes of one trained in the traditions of Badajos, Corunna, Waterloo, Balaclava, and Darghai, the shame is of the kind which commits a Japanese general to *hari-kari*.

I can still see, as some horrible dream, hundreds of British soldiers, rifles and ammunition intact, streaming down the roads, flying in the face of the enemy. They appeared like whipped curs: men in panic can be just so. The roads were filled with them, if not actually running, all moving fast, bunched like sheep, and there were ambulances at the C.C.S. evacuating wounded and still bringing more in. The retreat, rout, panic, call it what you will, must have proceeded very fast. That is what I thought. I asked some of the men where they were going. No one seemed to know. They said that swarms of Germans were behind and that everyone had been killed or captured. A Captain said he was retiring to the hills behind. That would be at Cassel, or so far as he was concerned in so obvious haste, at Calais. I struck him. It may not have been justified, but I have not been worried by the fact of his death since. No qualm of conscience. Then I collected my handful of lads and we pedalled our bicycles farther south.

We saw German "greys" from a meadow, but not an English soldier in sight. It seemed quite silly. They were about four hundred yards away, and turned a light machine-gun on us. The boot of one of my lads was ripped and the front fork of my bicycle was so bent that the wheel refused to go round. I was possessed of the strongest impulse to do something heroic. I remember feeling so at the time. But two rifles and a revolver are of not much use against a machine-gun, so I ran back to the C.C.S.; and it was there that I persuaded the young man with the Ford ambulance to motor me to Meteren.

Then I discovered the estaminet at La Belle Croix Farm on the Hoegenacker Ridge. British soldiers mad with drink. Some inside, and others shouting outside with bottles. They had been filled with funk and now were filled with drink. There was nobody there to make an appeal to their manhood, and, even

if there had been, I doubt if any such appeal could have been effective. I drove the men out towards the enemy. Two days later I saw the bottles, empty, and in front of them a large number of twisted corpses. Those were the men I sent out to their death. I can still realize one man in particular, a great kilted Scot. He was crazy with drink, fighting drunk, but with no fight in him. I saw his huge body lurch forward over the hill-top, and then the great torso, huge shoulders, and waving arms went limp and he disappeared from view. He was a filthy sight afterwards, the whole body churned with machine-gun bullets, the clotted pools of blood stinking with wine. So this pack at least was successful in drowning, once and for all, their sorrows in drink.

My Scouts, boys of eighteen and nineteen, showed extraordinary heroism, taking the leadership, and ordering the defence with uncommon coolness and initiative. No sooner was the lorry halted than we came under heavy machine-gun and rifle-fire.

In a very few minutes eight guns were disposed on the crest of the hill, one of "Hog's back" formation, lying between the Steam Mill, south of Bailleul and the Steenbecque by Merris, culminating in Belle Croix Farm and the Hoegenacker Windmill. The lorry returned, bringing two of my companies into action, and I disposed them over a three-mile front, absolutely naked of defence, and one which we held, almost unaided and alone, as will be seen, despite most heavy attacks and severe losses against the attacks of certainly six German Divisions, without relief for seven days.

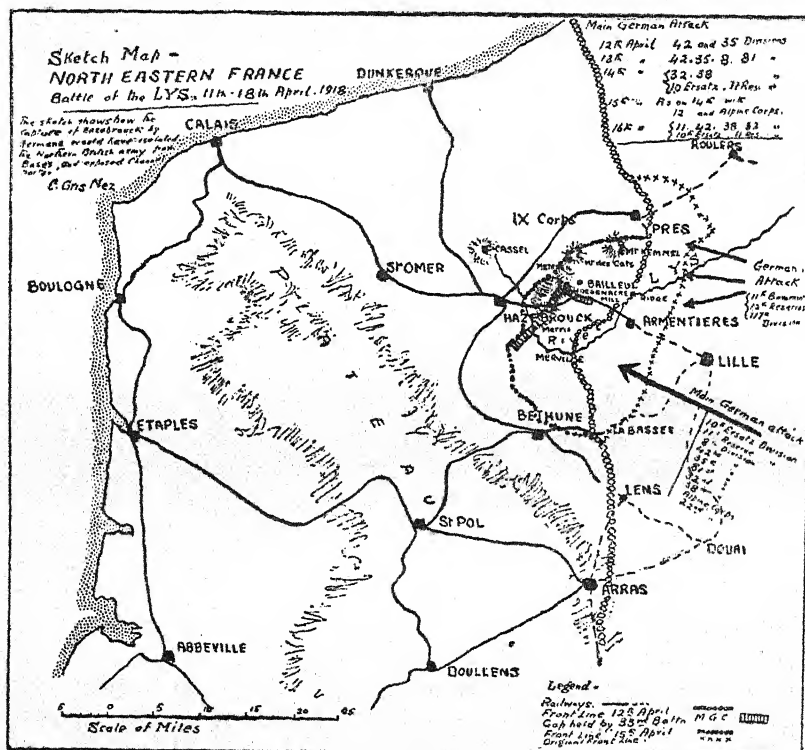
The importance which this slight rise of ground assumed on the morning of the 12th April and until nightfall on the 15th must be realized. Even as the Flers Ridge of the Somme battlefield is the only eminence between the great plain of Belgium and that of northern France, so upon a smaller scale the Hoegenacker Ridge is the only considerable rise in ground covering Hazebrouck and the approach to the Belgian hills, Kemmel, Mont Rouge, Mont Noir, and the Scherpenberg.

Possessed of the Hoegenacker Ridge, with its all-round field of fire for upwards of 4000 yards to the south, a defending force can prevent the massing of troops for the assault, and can hamper all movement over a frontage of five miles and a depth of two miles. Conversely the capture of the ridge by the enemy not only gave to him valuable cover and concealment from observation as well as safety from direct fire, and freedom to concentrate

for the assault, but at the same time contributed observation facilities of the utmost value.

As the ridge is possessed of an admirable field of fire to the south, so also there is a view, uninterrupted except for hedgerows and farmsteads, to the north and west, covering the southern and western approaches to Meteren, commanding Flêtre, Merris, and Hazebrouck itself, a field of view and fire of exceptional advantage to attack.

This point of such immensely valuable tactical importance to



either side in the fight lay on the extreme right flank of the 9th Corps, and its frontage approximated to that of the 21st Corps which on the 11th had evaporated in casualties and in a retreat of its remaining troops without rear-guard action. The 9th Corps itself, with every available man capable of bearing arms, was strung out in a thin line, fighting desperately at every point against superior numbers, its resources wholly exhausted, not a platoon remaining which could be used to hold the ridge or to form a defensive flank on its right to the south of Meteren and Bailleul.

This was the situation at dawn on the 12th April. A gap, on a three-mile front, lay immediately before Hazebrouck, only four miles distant. With astonishing speed the Germans advanced with little or no resistance being offered. By 10.45 a.m., the hour at which in reconnaissance I came under fire by Oostersteene, the enemy had penetrated a depth of 5000 yards, biting out a deep salient in the existing gap with advanced troops armed with light machine-guns spread out between Merris and the Steam Mill, south of Meteren.

The right flank of the 9th Corps was in the air. The command of the Hoegenacker Ridge by the enemy would not only expose the Corps line to being rolled up to the north through Neuve Eglise, but would prevent any further reserves, when brought up, from reaching the line, except at great risk in suffering heavy casualties before battle was joined from direct fire from the ridge itself.

The 9th Corps, indeed the whole front of the British Army in Flanders, was, therefore, exposed to great peril. Hazebrouck itself was a rail-head and junction of strategic as well as tactical importance. Upon the town converged the British lateral communications, north and south, from the port of Dunkerque through Hazebrouck to Béthune, Arras, and St. Pol, and it was the focus of the railways from the coast at Dunkerque, Calais, and Boulogne. To the north of the Etaples-St. Pol-Arras line there is no other railway communication. The coast line between Calais and Boulogne turns at right angles, east and south, at Cape Griz Nez. At the south-eastern corner of an approximate rectangle stands Hazebrouck, the other corners being Dunkerque, Calais, Boulogne. Dunkerque is only twenty-five miles distant, Calais diagonally across the rectangle thirty-two miles, Boulogne thirty-five miles. St. Omer itself, the convergence of important main roads, is a bare ten miles from Hazebrouck.

Hazebrouck was, therefore, the key to the Channel ports, itself dominated by the Hoegenacker Mill ridge, a position on the morning of the 12th April of inestimable importance. The piercing of the line at this point, before the arrival of reinforcements to stem the tide, would break the British Army in two, throwing the northern portion back on Dunkerque, Calais, and Boulogne, the southern army to form a new front facing north, with the loss of the Channel ports. Moreover, the saving of the ports themselves after the loss of Hazebrouck would considerably lessen their strategic value. Their loss involved a ready possibility for the intensification of the U-boat campaign, harassing

cross-Channel communication. Although by the 12th French troops were on the move, these reinforcements could not arrive before the 14th or 15th, and, even then, should the German have broken through on the 12th, it is very doubtful whether the French could have contributed beyond assisting to form a new flank facing north, following the Boulogne-St. Omer road.

The saving of Hazebrouck was the vital necessity. To save Hazebrouck it was vital to retain the Hoegenacker Ridge until reinforcements, using the rail-head, had come into line and had filled the breach in strength.

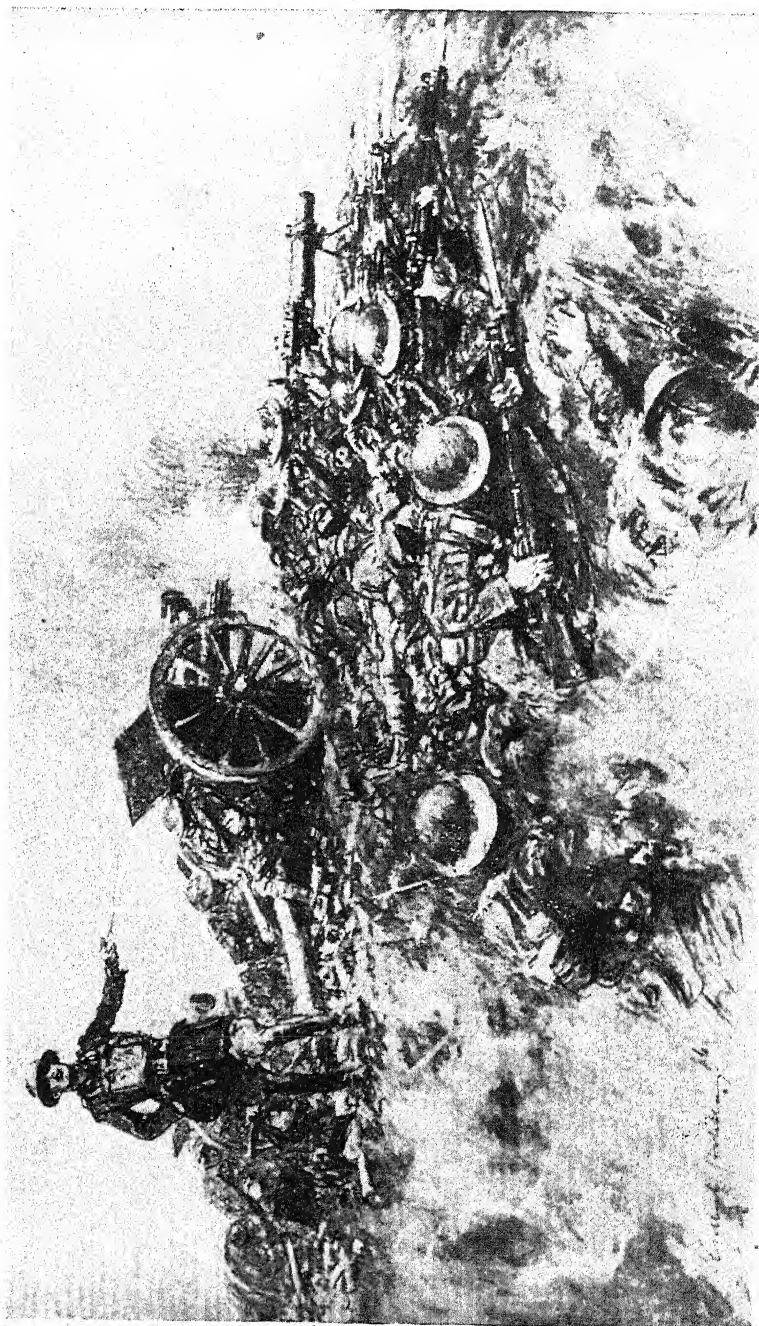
The 33rd Division detrained at Meteren at 10 p.m. on the 11th. The 100th Brigade was sent up immediately to stem the tide at Neuve Eglise. The 98th Brigade was hurried north-east of Bailleul, each Brigade with a Company of machine-guns. The 19th Brigade remained in reserve in Meteren, two Companies of the 33rd Battalion Machine-Gun Corps in farm buildings half a mile to the south. No one was aware of the débacle on the right of the IXth Corps, to which, with the exception of some small units of Corps' troops, hastily mobilized, the 33rd Division was the last available reserve. And of the Division but one Brigade and two Machine-Gun Companies remained on the morning of the 12th April.

At 10.45 a.m. the reconnaissance had been made. At that moment the decision to hold the Hoegenacker Ridge had been taken. By 11.30 a.m. machine-guns were in action from its summit sweeping the approaches from the south. At this hour the ridge was held. With the exception of the loss of two gun positions rushed by the enemy on the 13th, whose gun teams died at their posts, the ridge was held until 7 p.m. on the 14th, after reinforcements had come into line, with French reserves in great numbers east of Hazebrouck, and after a trenched position, wired, had been constructed just south of Meteren.

The particular incident of going into action on the Hoegenacker Ridge in the manner described is probably the most thrilling in which organized machine-gunners have ever participated. The rapidity of action ; the extraordinary situation ; the perfect discipline and drill ; the setting of untouched farm-houses, copses, and quietly grazing cattle ; the flying civilians with their crazy carts piled high with household chattels and the retiring Infantry behind ; the magnificent targets obtained ; and the complete grip of the situation by, and determination of Machine-Gunners—this action takes the highest place for all time in the history of the Machine-Gun Corps, and is an epic of the tenacity



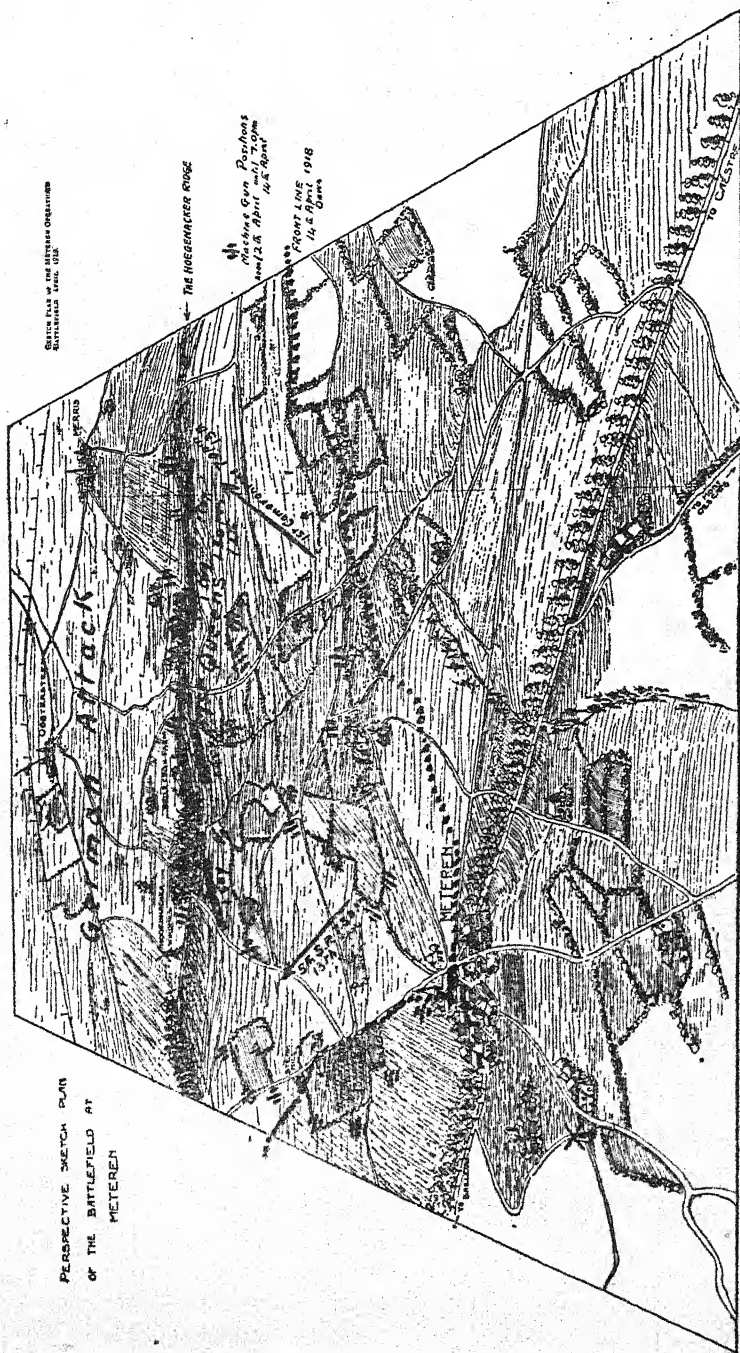
GERMAN TROOPS IN THE ATTACK



"THE LAST LINE OF DEFENCE"

From a drawing by Gilbert Holiday.

The thin British line withstands the massed assaults of the German Army. Survivors of the 10th Worcestershires with A/88 Battery R.F.A. holding the Crest of Messines Ridge, 10th April, 1918.



PERSPECTIVE SKETCH PLAN
OF THE BATTLEFIELD AT
METEREN

and grit of the British soldier, well led by subordinate commanders with backs to the wall fighting against great odds.

After an hour of the action, I made a very full reconnaissance with my Adjutant. We discovered in the Belle Croix estaminet beside the mill a crowd of stragglers, fighting drunk. We routed them out, and, with a machine-gun trained on them, sent them forward towards the enemy. They perished to a man.

Then, as we ourselves left the inn, we found that the advancing Germans had infiltrated between our gun posts, and we came under a hot machine-gun fire at close range. Why we were not immediately torn to ribbons passes my comprehension. We dropped to the ground on a field, fortunately heavily furrowed by fresh ploughing, and while machine-gun bullets flicked past our ears and ripped the haversacks on our backs, we worked our way down the furrows as rapidly as possible, clawing at the earth as we travelled on our stomachs.

About 1.30 p.m. the 1st Queen's began to come into line from the direction of Meteren, but had no information whatever, and I disposed A Company in the line while my Adjutant led D Company into position.

With the Commander of A Company I stormed the windmill which had fallen into German hands, and we recaptured it in a hand-to-hand fight with German storm troops.

The equipment for my Signallers was with the transport, and I placed two men in the loft of the windmill with handkerchiefs tied to sticks, so that from the windows of its eminence they could watch the moves of the enemy. One man, a great hulking fellow from the Yorkshire moors, remained in the mill top for three days until long after it had fallen into German hands, and finally escaped back to our lines attired in the uniform of a German soldier, after the mill had been blown down by our own artillery fire.

By two o'clock the left flank of the Queen's had been turned, the troops who were supposed to be in position, those stragglers whom I had collected, having dwindled away. I could see large bodies of the enemy concentrating about fifteen hundred yards south-east of Meteren and in the copses by Oostersteene. As they debouched we wracked them with machine-gun fire, and could observe enormous losses inflicted among them.

I finally collected a party of many different units under a Cyclists' Officer and disposed them to give local protection to my guns, especially on the left flank by the Steam Mill towards Bailleul. Troops of every formation now began to dwindle into the line, rushed up in motor lorries from the Headquarters of the

9th Corps. Cooks, batmen, pioneers, even what seemed like a platoon of Town Majors under an Area Commandant.

By nightfall the line, though extremely thin, was continuous and held.

I entered a farm-yard in the village of Merris and found a foaming horse accoutred in the yard. I was held in conversation by the farmer, who alleged the horse to be his own. On leaving the house the horse was gone, as it then seemed that of one of an enemy patrol.

Meanwhile, on my instruction, and following his own initiative, my good friend, the lorry driver, had made journey after journey through intense shell and machine-gun fire, bringing ammunition, personnel, picks and shovels to my headquarters at the mill, and distributing tools round the Queen's outpost line.

We worked feverishly during the night throwing out a wide stockade around the machine-gun posts. But under cover of the mist, at dawn on the 13th, the enemy delivered a heavy attack on the centre of the line, at Belle Croix Farm. The Queen's gave way and two of my gun posts were rushed, both officers in charge being killed, and the Company Commander wounded. A Company of the Queen's made two counter-attacks, and three times within one hour the mill passed through our hands to those of the enemy and back again. I was not "at home" in the mill during the first early morning assault, or without doubt I should have been killed, though I returned to join the second counter-attack, which re-won the mill.

One of my sergeants went out to retrieve a gun which had fallen into enemy hands at dawn; and a corporal penetrated the enemy lines to a distance of two hundred yards and brought back the other, which he got into action. Both men reported that the teams had died at their posts, having piled enemy dead before their guns.

The early afternoon of the 13th was most critical. The enemy had courageously pressed forward. We were under continuous shell and machine-gun fire, suffering casualties all the while, and the Queen's, who had only recently been reinforced by very young and inexperienced soldiers, began to weaken all along the line and retired from the ridge to a position about 800 yards to the north. The attack had been pressed hard on our left, and I feared that we should find ourselves assaulted from the rear. So, with two horses which had been found, I rode with my orderly as far as Bailleul. There was not a soul in the streets of this once favourite billeting town. We galloped over the cobbles,

while shells fell among the masonry, and brick-dust filled the eyes and nostrils.

I was able to establish touch with a Brigade on our left and requested them to squeeze in to prevent the enemy from penetrating the village of Meteren. I did not now think it would be possible to maintain the line. We were running short of ammunition despite the exertion of the lorry driver, had no spare barrels, and with the exception of the Cameronians, no further reinforcements came to my long and scattered line.

But at eight o'clock my Transport Officer arrived, and in a style reminiscent of the Royal Horse Artillery at an Aldershot field-day, the fighting limbers with belt boxes, and small-arms ammunition were galloped through a hail of shell and machine-gun fire to our gun positions; and my mounted orderlies, too, had arrived to be with me as far-seeing eyes and quick messengers to give me information from, or to carry orders to, any part of the line.

In the late afternoon German Cavalry galloped out from the cover of the copses to the south-east of Meteren, but were decimated by our fire.

Apparently an order had been issued by the G.O.C. 19th Brigade for a retirement of the Infantry to a line 1000 yards north of the Hoegenacker Ridge on the late afternoon of the 13th. No such order was communicated to me. Most of the troops had in fact so retired. Many had become casualties, due especially to lack of training in the use of cover and ground. The losses included many officers endeavouring to rally inexperienced soldiers who continually exposed themselves and suffered losses from an enemy who, creeping forward, made admirable use of every fold of ground and of each hedgerow and ditch. Despite this order the Commander of A Company of the Queen's with his remaining men remained as invaluable escort to the machine-guns, continually patrolling the gaps between them.

By night a continuous hail of bullets was kept up from the ridge, cones of fire, interlaced, and enfilading the whole front.

At dawn on the 14th a further very heavy attack was made on our positions, and wide gaps were made in the front covered by the Queen's and the Cameronians.

The enemy exploited these gains to full advantage, pushing forward light machine-guns with great rapidity. The Queen's were very much shaken, and with the Cameronians again began to recede from their positions. On this morning our line was definitely maintained by the splendid devotion to duty of my machine-gunners, who suffered severe losses.

I moved continually between my posts, sometimes on horse-back, and sometimes on foot, and witnessed the enemy dead piled before our guns. The heaviest losses were inflicted.

So critical was the situation that I issued orders to my sergeants in charge of gun teams that at any time they saw British troops retiring they were to fire on them ; and from near the mill I saw one of my gunners destroy a platoon of one regiment which in panic was in flight.

Between 6 and 7 p.m. another determined attack was made on our front. I had sent back continuous report to General Mayne commanding the 19th Brigade, and so seriously did he regard the situation that he asked me to come to him in his headquarters in Meteren personally to report. He asked me whether it was possible for any line to be held south and east of Meteren pending the arrival of further reinforcements, none of which could not be expected immediately.

I replied that this was possible. He turned over to my command two platoons of the 2nd New Zealand Entrenching Battalion. The line, 800 yards north of the Hoegenacker Ridge, which I had caused to be trenched and wired, which I took up was that which up to the end of the operations on the 19th constituted our front line ; and this I now made our front line on the 14th. I could not have asked for or expected any better co-operation than that rendered by the New Zealanders. I immediately issued written orders for the withdrawal of my guns to this line, and for them to be disposed in depth behind it. "The withdrawal to be carried out, Section by Section, and Gun by Gun, with covering fire." Writing in my official War Diary for April 1918, I recorded : "No finer retirement could have been carried out. In the face of great enemy opposition, and in the teeth of heavy machine-gun fire at its outset, it was carried out without loss to either personnel or material, and every gun was withdrawn by concealed approaches and with irreproachable discipline to the line to which the Infantry had retired with some disorder, and which was now held firm by a few New Zealand marksmen." This truth stood the test of critical examination, as is evidenced by the generous award of decorations and medals among the men of my command.¹

There is further evidence as to the tactical importance of the Hoegenacker Ridge to be found in its later history. In full realization of the command of ground to the north and west afforded by this eminence, prior to the forward drive of the

¹ 1 D.S.O. ; 3 M.C.'s ; 14 D.C.M.'s ; 27 M.M.'s.

2nd Army as part of the general Allied offensive, orders were issued for the capture of the Ridge. It was necessary for this to be done in order that troops could be massed for the subsequent attack under cover from observation. The assault on the Hoegenacker Ridge, a minor operation, was carried out by the 9th Scottish Division on the 18th of August.¹ It is significant that within four days of its capture by the British the Germans evacuated the whole of the Lys Salient with the object of releasing their own posts and movements from observation.

By dawn on the 15th I had established a good line. To this returned my Signallers from the loft of the Hoegenacker mill. On the morning of the 15th I called for a volunteer from among my Mounted Orderlies to reconnoitre the whole position. My groom, riding my big black horse, "Old Bill," fleet of foot and a magnificent jumper, rode the whole length of the line under a hail of fire for three miles along the front of our posts, while I observing him, noted his trail upon my map, and thus was able to mark the whole of our front. As he rode past the front of the 1st Queen's, the men rose from the little trenches which they had dug and cheered him lustily, as they had done when the Transport wagons had galloped through their lines delivering ammunition to my posts.

Towards the end of the action on the 18th when our line was firmly established, and French troops were appearing as reinforcement, I went out with my Adjutant to make a further reconnaissance. As we were returning to my headquarters, the enemy placed a barrage of shells all around us. We were riding bicycles and breathing heavily,

Though over and over again we had conducted gas-helmet instructions, foolishly neglectful I freely admit, neither my Adjutant nor I had ourselves experimented with this clumsy apparatus. It was minutes before we could get the masks over our faces, and already our lungs were filled with gas. Too many minutes. A little white dog beside the bicycles coughed itself to death at our feet. We staggered a few yards to a building, and found it to be an Artillery Headquarters. There we collapsed on the floor.

I do not remember anything until I discovered myself still lying on the floor, sometime at night in pitch darkness, with the

¹ *History of 9th (Scottish) Division* (p. 331): "The ground secured was of real importance as it dominated the whole sector, and unless the enemy had abandoned all hope of defence in this district he was bound to counter-attack. . . . Four days after the capture of the Hoegenacker Ridge the Germans commenced a retreat on this front which did not close until they had abandoned the whole of the Lys Salient."

sound of heavy rifle-fire close beside me. My Adjutant and I arose and spent the remainder of the night wandering over the fields near Flêtre. My throat was raw, my lungs wheezed horribly, and my head buzzed. I had no clear recollection of anything.

No British warrior, possessed of knowledge of all the circumstances, can fail to pay just tribute to Hindenburg's strategy in the "Michael Offensive," followed by that known as the "Georgs-Schlacht," the former being the general attack of the 21st March, and the latter designating what to the Germans is known as "The Battle of Kemmel," and in British records is described as "The Battle of the Lys." Hindenburg achieved more in this attack than did either British or French in any of the offensives on the Western Front. The capture of ground was far greater, as also was that of prisoners and of war material.

The offensive, also, achieved the further and most important objective of doing much to destroy the morale of the British armies. There is ample testimony that morale recovered, and quickly, in the triumphant record of the Allied Final Offensive, the brunt of which fell on the British Army. But we may wonder whether this would have been possible without the availability of tens of thousands of American troops in the battle-line, and at the date of the Armistice some two million Americans in France. Hindenburg's objective was to destroy the British armies before the entry of the Americans. He failed, for reasons beyond the scope of this volume, but he successfully undermined morale, especially that of younger soldiers, ill-trained, who had not in fact taken part in battle before the end of April. Important and authoritative German war histories describe the British retreat as panic. In places it was no less.

It has been suggested that Hindenburg would have been better advised to retire to a shorter line, and there bargain for peace. The strategist can be wise after events. The Michael and Georgs offensives so very nearly shattered the British armies, as may be read from Haig's Order of the Day of the 14th April, one almost of despair, that the soldier must realize a justification for the offensive.

We, who strove to break the Georgs Offensive in April, and succeeded, must also pay our tribute to the courage and tenacity of the German assault. Every intelligent German soldier must have realized from his knowledge of political events that the Georgs-Schlacht was Germany's last throw of the dice, the final chance for victory.

South of Bailleul, the spear-point of the thrust towards Hazebrouck was the Alpine Corps, the famous *Leib-Regiments*. The histories of the regiments composing the 6th German Army declare how battalion after battalion hurled themselves into the battle-line against Meteren and south of Bailleul. They record, also, a tragic list of casualties.

While we may commend the courage of the assault, we may glory in the satisfaction that machine-guns in the hands of men of toughest breed withstood every attack—fire power, superior at the decisive point, supported by a morale no less high than that of the enemy. To the machine-gun went the victory.

It was against the Alpine Corps that we were again pitted later in the bitter fighting around Villers Guislain in September. Then, in defence, the Leib-Regiments exacted reparations. Salute !

By the 17th of April it was clear that the German attack had expended itself. Each hour the strength of our artillery, both 18-pounders and French .75's, supported by adequate heavier pieces, arrived to the defence. Ammunition was conveyed to the lines by pack animals and limbers during the night ; while the General Staff conveyed new machine-guns and belt-boxes to my headquarters in the Divisional cars.

The 14th Jäger Regiment, fighting on the left of the Alpine Corps, " encountered murderous machine-gun fire," as is related in its Regimental history.

The 10th Reserve Infantry Regiment of the 81st Division which stormed Belle Croix Farm reports losses in this battle of 30 officers and 631 men. Its history records that at " 5.30 on the afternoon of the 12th a further attack was made against the English line, when the 3rd Battalion came under most heavy fire. It was reinforced between 6 and 7 by the 2nd Battalion, and later relieved." There appears to have been no lack of energy in this assault, and these Landwehr men seem to have rejoiced in the English canteens and " good French red wine " which fell into their hands.

The 35th and 42nd Division led the German attack against the Hoegenacker Ridge. The losses of the 35th Division, amongst its Regiments the 61st, 141st, and 176th, were so heavy that the Division was withdrawn on the 14th. Between the 12th and 16th April the 42nd Division, composed of the 17th, 131st, and 138th Regiments, lost 50 per cent of its total strength.

On the 13th two further Divisions, the 81st and 8th, were thrown into the attack. On the 13th a fresh assault was made by the 10th Ersatz Division, the 11th Reserve Division, the 32nd Saxon Division, and the 30th Division. On the 15th the 12th Division, with the Alpine Corps, was added. On the 16th the attack was made by the 11th Reserve Division, the Alpine Corps, the 38th Division, with the addition, also, of the 42nd Division ; while the 32nd Saxon and 10th Ersatz Divisions, which had suffered very heavily, were withdrawn to Reserve. On the 17th, three Divisions, the 81st, the 38th, and the Alpine Corps, whose earlier attacks had been frustrated, were thrown into the battle, together with the new 22nd Division which had been hurried from Alsace.

The attacks of these ten Divisions broke down with the heaviest losses on the front held by the 33rd Battalion Machine-Gun Corps between the south of Bailleul and Merris from the 12th to the morning of the 18th April.

The French Chasseurs were now streaming up the roads and coming into line, but some confusion was caused by the difficulty in distinguishing the blue-grey uniforms of the French from the field-grey of the German troops.

One further attack of extraordinary violence followed. In its earlier stages we took prisoners ; and these were located for safety in the various headquarters. When the headquarters of the 9th King's Liverpools was invested by a further enemy sortie the prisoners treacherously seized arms and murdered the Battalion Commander. But the line was held, as it had been from the 12th of April, surrendering only a few hundred yards to the several German Divisions which had again and again attacked the thin Brigade Front.

Von Hindenburg in his memoirs, *Out of My Life*, attempts to demonstrate that the British defence was only made possible by the arrival of the French. This is not accurate, as the preceding record affirms.

It is significant that Colonel Charteris, on the Staff of Sir Douglas Haig at G.H.Q., has recorded no entry in his Diary between 12th April and 14th April, and again between the 14th and the 18th. But on 6th April he wrote that "the battle is over"; and on the 8th, he recorded, "the Generalissimo business is not all that everyone expected of it."

The German attack in Flanders, the Battle of the Lys, seems to have wholly surprised G.H.Q.

Then on the 12th, in passages of anguish, Colonel Charteris wrote: "We have no reserves. . . . The French are doing nothing. . . ."

In referring on the 14th to Sir Douglas Haig's famous "backs to the wall" Order, published on that day, Colonel Charteris deploras its issue, lest its terms become known to the enemy and encourage him. As one participating in the fighting, my own view is that the Order was unnecessary, for it could scarcely be made known to the troops engaged until after the battle decision. The terms of the Order of the Day, curiously emotional in a Commander of Haig's frigid character, are echoed in crescendo by Colonel Charteris in his personal Diary.¹

French G.Q.G. on the 14th April estimated that the Germans, after having engaged 102 Divisions in their offensives of 21st to the 30th March, had by this date thrown a further 24 new Divisions on the Bailleul Front. It should be noted that G.Q.G. condemns, with little justice, first General Gough and then Haig, both for the retreat of the 5th Army and for the retirement on Bailleul and at Ypres. French Staff officers, writing of the events, are querulous that French Divisions and Batteries were needed to assist the British Army, and that Haig "addressed an anguished appeal to Foch."²

Faults there were, but these lay less in the movement of troops to meet the German onslaught, infinitely less in their tactical handling, than in a system of command on the Western Front which provided for disunity and misunderstanding, and for no apportionment and proper employment of reserves. The unified command, the vesting of full powers in Foch on the Western Front, in the very nick of time, changed all that.

Responsibility for the appointment of a Generalissimo in a war in which Allies are engaged lies with the statesmen. It need not be laboured that such an appointment is hedged round with difficulty, national pride being not the least. But failure, arising from disunity, from separate and divided commands in the same battle zone, inviting no appropriate apportionment of reserves for the whole front, or in the entire manœuvre area, is the responsibility of statesmen, not of the several generals charged with leadership and the conduct of operations in the field.

¹ Brigadier-General Charteris, writing in his Diary on April 12, says: "God grant the decision is not against us. . . . Our men are fighting well, but are hopelessly outnumbered and practically untrained, owing to the enormous front we have had to hold all winter. . . . recriminations are useless. After all, the real judges are those of history, and the Army has little cause to fear the verdict."

² *La Vérité sur la Guerre, 1914-1918.*

Had Ludendorff flung his reserves, subsequently utilized in a last vain attempt to overwhelm the Australians before Amiens, into the Battle of the Lys upon any day between the 12th and the evening of the 15th April, it is probable that the line could not have been held, nor were the French then sufficiently available. It may be suggested that the tactics of infiltration, so successful in crumbling the Infantry defence, were permitted also to influence the strategic policy from which they should have been kept rigidly apart. For Ludendorff, failing to break the British resistance before the Channel ports, switched the attack back towards the Amiens-Paris railway; and later in desperation, in an attempt to shatter the morale of the Allied Line, returned again to assault in the Lys Salient, wresting Mont Kemmel, Mont Noir, Mont Rouge, from the French. But the loss of Kemmel did nothing more than inconvenience our mode of life later in the Ypres Salient.

The co-operation with the French in this battle produced the following letter from the French Commander :

To General Pinney, Commanding 33rd Division.

" MON GENERAL,

" A mon grand regret des ordres recents m'enlevent le grand honneur et le plaisir de combattre en liaison avec vous et avec vos braves troupes. Mais le regret est attendue par la co-operation de vos guerriers et des miens qui existe depuis deux jours devant Meteren, co-operation qui ma permis d'apprécier la bravoure et la tenacité de vos belles troupes.

" Veuillez mon General croire à mon amitié et a mon devouement.

" (Signed) GENERAL VALENTIN, C.B.,

" Commanding 133rd Divn. Frn."

The record of this notable feat of arms, ranking in the annals of British military history with those of the far lesser but historic stands of the Shangani River and of Rorke's Drift, cannot be passed without reference to the redoubtable defence of Neuve Eglise by the 2nd Worcestershires, supported by machine-guns, from my own command, with Rifles and Glasgow Highlanders covering the flanks. While the right flank of the Worcestershires was gradually being forced back one of my machine-guns opened heavy fire, and succeeded in pinning the enemy for a time to the ground. For a time only; for it was discovered that the left flank was also weakening, the solitary machine-gun being the

pivot on which two big backward movements were swinging. The gun team, deliberately exposing their backs to the enemy, turned to stem the tide on their left.

By twelve noon on the 13th, the Worcestershires were entirely cut off, maintaining an all-round defence at the Mairie and at the church of Neuve Eglise. That day saw some of the bitterest hand-to-hand fighting ever known to British soldiers. Many gallant sorties were made. Riflemen and Lewis-gunners repeatedly stemmed rushes of the enemy up the streets leading to the Square, and across its wide space poured a withering fire with murderous effect. A Lewis-gun, mounted in the Mairie window, fired into the backs of the Germans as they attempted to force an entrance into the church, defended by the Battalion Commander, assisted by the chaplain and a handful of men. When the enemy attempted to rush the Mairie and bomb the occupants, a corporal, hidden in a doorway, shot the arms of the bombers, exploding their bombs. Machine-gunners raked the Square, piling it high with German dead. And while the Worcestershire riflemen fired through the church windows, in which still the leaded coloured glass shed a soft illumination upon the wreckage of the altar, the chaplain kept safe the precincts of the curé by throwing bombs from the verger's door.

Touch was lost with the Companies holding the left. "They were last heard of holding on against overwhelming odds, fighting it out to the last." I extract this notable passage from the IXth Corps' Special Order No. 3 of the 11th of July. This Order continues: "By their well-planned and spirited defence under very difficult conditions, the Battalion kept the enemy at bay for three days, without rest, and in the face of greatly superior numbers. Fine patrol work delayed and harassed the preparation of attacks, rapidity of counter-attacks, coupled with skilful disposition of forces in response to every enemy move, obliged him time after time to relinquish his gains. Tenacity, when all seemed hopeless, opened the way to safety."

During these operations the total casualties of the Infantry of the Division were 181 officers and 3760 other ranks, but with this heavy list it is not a high estimate to say that the losses of the Germans must have been at least five times this number.

The Awards of the Division for the operations between the 12th and 19th April were notable—one V.C., two Bars to D.S.O., four D.S.O.'s, two Bars to M.C., forty M.C.'s, forty-two D.C.M.'s, twenty Bars to M.M., and two hundred and eighty-seven M.M.'s.

Awards and Decorations, whether for gallantry on the

battlefield or for other services, must give rise always to much heartburning, unless those for gallantry are distinctly distinguished from those awarded for other services. But yet, since mere bravery can neither win a battle, nor even perhaps serve with wisdom a tactical situation, it would be unwise that in the esteem of the public, understanding little of military affairs, the rewards for courage shall be held in higher esteem than those for distinguished military services.

The Victoria Cross, alone among Decorations, is conferred exclusively for gallantry in the field. Yet, when a whole nation is called to arms, the Victoria Cross itself, by virtue of the very distinction which it holds in public esteem, becomes an Award for gallantry no less, but governed by political influence. There were certain *corps d'élite*, wherein, from among those recommended for gallantry in the field, some must receive the Victoria Cross. Conversely, it might and did so happen that a Divisional Brigade or Unit Commander would recommend one under his command for the highest Award. But, though neither merit nor gallantry was disputed, the Higher Command considered that perhaps too many Victoria Crosses were being bestowed upon London or Scottish soldiers, while the county of Lancashire, for example, itself providing almost as many soldiers as Scotland, was well behind in the matter of receiving Victoria Crosses. The "Home Front," especially for an Army dependent upon a voluntary system for its recruitment, must be considered. The stimulation of an Award of the Victoria Cross, with the publicity afforded by the acclamation of the recipient, is calculated to have a wholesome effect upon recruiting. The Victoria Cross must, therefore, be bestowed more or less equally in various territorial regions and among various classes. Perhaps the City Regiments, due to the influence of politicians and influential Corporations, scored with better advantage than did the more humble County Regiments, and war-born formations, lacking influential parentage.

Extricated from this battle and relieved by Australians and French, we went to rest behind Cassel. Here Monsieur Clemenceau, the "Tiger," Prime Minister of France, whose personal appearance belied his name, inspected the Division. Clad in a soft felt hat, a long swallow-tailed Cheviot coat with great poacher-pockets, baggy knee-breeches, brown and ill-fitting gaiters over black boots, a stick, he breathed benevolence.

But the Flemish peasants who streamed along the roads were possessed of no such grateful feeling towards those who had

prevented an enemy invasion of their lands. Frail human nature, whose eyes only witnessed smoking farms and ruined homesteads, with crops ploughed up by shell-fire, and cattle lying dead in the fields, could understand no farther than the immediate tragedy encompassed in their own quiet lives.

During the height of battle, while placing a farm-house in a state of defence, I was amazed to discover, brought from its cellars and attics, huge stores of Army rations, tinned foods, and whole parcels of clothing, shirts, pants, vests, which I presume the farmer had traded with some quartermaster, possessed of no nice sense as to the limit of "scrounging," against the produce and comforts of farm life. As an act of reparation, and, moreover, to save these from destruction, my lads brought along to my Battalion Headquarters two fine milking cows, which sustained us well during the battle ; and, since their pace was slow, were subsequently, for the benefit of Battalion funds, sold to the Australian Battalion Commander who relieved me. These two cows were subsequently handed over as trench stores from one Battalion to another, surviving as such certainly until the third week in August.¹

The roads around Cassel had become a seething mass of troops and refugees, the latter struggling along carrying beds, mattresses, fowls, children, and furniture indiscriminately on their persons, or perched upon the crazy carts which every family seemed to possess. To the east the villages and farms were wreathed in smoke. To the west lay rank upon rank of British, French, and American troops, who filled every village and every barn. In those days many a British soldier went without his rations, and many a British horse was overloaded in the united effort of keeping the hearts of Flanders from breaking. For there could be no rest for these homeless refugees until they had trudged, or had been carried, for a distance of one hundred miles behind the firing-line.

Reformed and reinforced, back we went into the line again east of Dickebusch Lake, relieving the French Chasseurs. Goaded by victory lust, as yet unsatisfied, the German attack had been transferred from before Amiens, and burst again, but too late, upon our front. On the 8th of May, just before dawn, preceded by a very heavy bombardment, accompanied by gas, the Germans struck, effecting a dangerous breach between ourselves and the French. Fighting not dissimilar from that of the Meteren and Neuve Eglise battles followed. But we re-won the ground taken ; and the last furious German assault broke down without penetrating our lines.

¹ *History of the 9th (Scottish) Division* (p. 321), Cows.

The great German Offensive had been bent and broken, its way being barred both on the road to Paris and that to the alais Ports.

It may, perhaps, be deemed a retrogression to look beyond the actual history of battles. It cannot, however, be out of place to trace those issues which led up to the point of battle. The plans of the strategist are determined by diplomacy, and where strategy ends, tactics begin. Thus statecraft, strategy, and tactics carry equal weight, or nearly equal weight, in determining the results of battles. The silver thread of strategic and diplomatic purpose runs throughout a campaign, drawing in its train, not only Commanders-in-Chief, but all subordinate leaders. Statecraft and strategy go hand in hand ; strategy and tactics are linked together. The firm grasp of political, strategic, and tactical situations influences, in equal proportions, the success not only of a campaign but of each battle.

Therefore, in seeking those causes which influence success or failure in battle, we must probe to the bottom of the question—What directs the policy of the Commander-in-Chief? What influences the action of his subordinates? Wherein lies the success or failure of their enterprise? And what factors stir men to desperate energy or to half-hearted and even cowardly action in battle?—in a word, in what lies the secret of success, and in what of failure? War, like a game of chess, is the conflict between the brains and perseverance of two Commanders, each trying to outwit the other. It is thus¹ "pre-eminently the art of the man who dares take the risk : of the man who thinks deeply and clearly : of the man who, when accident intervenes, is not thereby cast down but changes his plans and his dispositions with the readiness of a resolute and reflective mind, which, so far as is possible, has foreseen and provided against mischance."

It is to be remembered that our Commanders were backed by the Governments for which they were directing the operations of war. If at any time there was any doubt, and sometimes there may have been cause, its direct result was a series of failures on the part of the troops to whom the Commanders issued their orders.

As we know, shortly after the close of 1917, the supreme command of the Allied Powers passed definitely, with the wish of Lord Haig, to Marshal Foch.

From April 1918 we can immediately detect the change. In August our National Army was being submitted to an unknown test which was made willingly and with deliberation, because, in

¹ *The Science of War*, by Colonel G. F. R. Henderson, C.B.

the opinion of the national advisers, the time had come for striking sharp blows, which would allow the country to emerge from a doubtful position into one of complete independence. Not only Governments, but whole Nations, rich and poor alike, gave willingly and continuously of their manhood, their wealth, and their storehouses, for the common good. "The first amongst all causes of victory," says Clausewitz, "is to pursue a great object with energy and perseverance."

Those who believed that our ultimate defeat, at any time in the campaign, was possible, can only have been blinded to national virtues. Those who held that our leaders were incapable, because of mistakes, were perhaps themselves guilty of causing the death of more British soldiers than even the most callous or ignorant general in the Army; for such is moral force that its possibilities for evil must always be, in the nature of man, greater than its qualities for good.

However brave men may be, generals have no burning desire to throw away their lives, and it is surely a needless precaution to urge them not to do so. When, with due allowance for particular circumstances and difficulties, after full and fair trial, their deeds fail to justify their casualty lists, then it is time enough to call them unskilful, not because they have lost men but because they have lost them in vain.

Clausewitz says: "Happy is the Army in which an untimely boldness manifests itself; it is an exuberant growth showing a rich soil. Even foolhardiness, that is boldness without an object, is not to be despised."¹

But foolhardiness of the same character repeated is a military crime. Frontal attacks against positions flanked by machine-guns is a boldness on the part of generalship to be despised, unless the operation be accompanied by some element for masking their fire, of distracting the attention of the gunners, or of surprise. The account of these operations demonstrates the extraordinary value of machine-guns in the hands of the defence, as at the battles of the Somme and of Arras.

The origin of the machine-gun dates far back into history. In 1663 the principle of a repeating fire-arm, where the action of reloading was governed by taking up the expending force of recoil, was produced by a Mr. Palmer. His invention was contributed to the *Transactions of the Royal Society*. His idea was "to make a pistol shooting as fast as it could be and yet to be stopped at pleasure, and wherein the motion of the fire and bullet within

¹ *Vom Kriege*.

was made to charge the piece with powder and bullet, to prime it and to open the cock.” The later automatic guns, those of Gatling, Faschamps, and Hotchkiss, departed from Palmer’s principle, and were of the type known as organ-guns, namely a number of barrels built together and discharged in series. It was not until Maxim, an American inventor, at that date, 1880, a pioneer of electric lighting, with no interests in armament, following a chance meeting with a Jew in Vienna, and subsequently with an enterprising Scot, turned his inventive genius to guns, with a small workshop in Hatton Garden, that the machine-gun, as we know it, based on Palmer’s principle, was evolved. Despite the fact that with his first model for demonstration purposes, Maxim was able to fire six hundred rounds each minute from a weapon weighing barely fifty pounds, it was many years before the War Office realized and recognized the astonishing advance in fire-power and its control achieved by this weapon.

The modern machine-guns, used by all nations to-day, are based upon Maxim’s inventions; and the Maxim pattern machine-gun is the most notable contribution to armament since the invention of the breach-loader, and probably since the first use of gun-powder for throwing projectiles.

Even nearly half a century later no invention can be said to have so revolutionized war tactics as machine-guns. There are many weighty arguments to support this theory.

Aeroplanes, on the other hand, have not much disturbed tactical behaviour. Their value, immense as it is, has been in reconnaissance, in target-spotting and definition, and in carrying projectiles beyond the range of gun-fire, namely bombing. Beyond this, aeroplanes conduct a warfare involving aerial tactical considerations, and wholly apart from Infantry action. This warfare has as its purpose the domination of the skies mainly for observation purposes. It is true that aeroplanes may sometimes harry troops on the line of march, even in defensive positions, by short range action; so to speak, by means of machine-guns mounted upon moving platforms firing from overhead. But their general use for such purposes must in the nature of Infantry movement be rare; is readily escapable, nor will favourable targets often present themselves. Whether or not great numbers of aeroplanes, or those capable of considerable loads, will be able to transport Infantry possessed of considerable fire power, for surprise attacks, or to possess themselves of important tactical points, or to invest and destroy strategic points such as railways and bridges, remains to be seen. The hazard

would always be great. The function of aeroplanes has, therefore, largely succeeded that of Cavalry, both in reconnaissance and in the harrying of a retreating enemy. Bombing behind the lines invites strategic consideration; and, except where it touches morale, does not concern the action of troops on the battlefield.

Aircraft enthusiasts incline to the view that "super" type aircraft, carrying men, machine-guns, ammunition, as well as provisions and equipment, will revolutionize the conduct of war. Aircraft in this sense, however, are only a means to the mobility of Infantry, aiding a tactical operation. Experts further claim that the "flying heavy gun," and aerial torpedoes directed by wireless waves from the ground constitute a revolution. It is an aid to Artillery, nothing more. Further, it is held that Infantry action will be wholly controlled from the air, in that troops will be unable to mass for the attack where air domination is possessed by the opposing side. There is something in this last argument. But the business of statecraft is to ensure that, in a state of war, armament is equal to the task.

Military aviation, apart from considerations purely aeronautical governing aerial tactics, is an invaluable aid to mobility, to the despatching of projectiles, to harrying reserves—a new element in war—to observing any movement, and to the gas attack. Since gas is now a factor to be considered in war, this latter is of importance. Irrespective of the direction in which the wind may be blowing, gas bombs can be dropped to windward of those areas in which it is desired to eliminate life, an object which cannot be accomplished by Infantry relying upon favourable winds for release. The air unquestionably adds to the speed at which warlike operations can be carried out.

Troop-carrying aircraft may make manœuvre more possible. But the hazard is great. Failure, even on a small scale, would be very damaging to morale, except as a dramatic attempt to surprise comparative with the Naval attack at Zeebrugge. Large numbers of aircraft would be required for the general purpose. The effect on morale merits close consideration. Even one burning aeroplane, with its pilot hurled to certain death, is a sight which evokes horror. The spectacle of only one or two troop-carrying aircraft falling to doom with forty to a hundred living souls, small as the actual number of casualties are, would, I suggest, prove a calamity, by sight and by repute, more appalling than the loss of thousands of men in pitched battle.

The use of poison gases presents a wholly new feature in the

conduct of war. Prior to 1914 the nature of the armament of various nations was common knowledge. The production of poison gases and their use in the training of armies has introduced a factor against which no nation can make certain defensive preparations. And since the chemical laboratories of the War Departments conduct their research in the greatest secrecy, no one belligerent, following the Declaration of War, can be confident that superior numbers of men and greater armament will contribute to him a victory against a factor the deadliness of which he is in ignorance. So long as arms are more or less evenly matched, the decision in war is vested in the skill of commanders and in the training and courage of armies. Tactical principles remain constant. But the secret introduction of chemicals and mechanical and scientific means are possessed of the power to change many of the desiderata which govern the movement of troops in the field.

The most highly trained army of men of inflexible courage, with the best generalship, even with overwhelming numbers and immensely superior armament, may be powerless against a handful of chemists armed with substances and devices which paralyse and kill.

It does not seem that in the present era of exaggerated nationalism any International agreement can govern such considerations, except in so far that since political considerations are paramount, the outlawry of chemical warfare inflicts upon the belligerent utilizing diabolical chemical means the penalty of having ranged against him the public opinion of the world. Fear of political consequences, therefore, as well as fear of reprisals, will probably confine the warfare of the future to means which are generally acceptable as humane.

Although introduced by Hiram Maxim so far back as 1880, no weapon has so revolutionized tactics as the machine-gun. Chemical warfare, and considerable use of troop-carrying aeroplanes, may revolutionize tactical principles, as may the considerable use of tanks armed with some paralyzing device, but that change has yet to come. The desideratum determining the means which accomplish a revolution in the conduct of war is the enabling of fire superiority to be established at the decisive point.

Immensely valuable as tanks proved to be in some phases of battle on the Western Front, their numbers were too few and their dispersal too great to permit of what might possibly have been essentially a tank victory. As moving fortresses, tanks

might have been of the highest value to the defence in March and April 1918, but their numbers were wholly insignificant for any such purpose. Even so, it is the armament of the tank, the machine-gun, which contributes its value.

The machine-gun, British, German, French, each of Maxim pattern, proved to be the decisive weapon of the Great War. Certain important lessons in organization were emphasized in the Meteren battle.

In operations of a fluid character, where manœuvre over a comparatively wide area is possible, machine-guns are most effective if organized under one control, with one centralized source of ammunition supply, feeding with reserve personnel, and replacement of damaged equipment.

The officer ordering the tactical disposal of machine-guns in the battle must not permit himself to become too closely involved in any one section of the fight. His command of weapons, capable of sustained accurate fire, implies his direction of the means to obtaining fire superiority. His duty is to be closely in touch with the Infantry Brigadiers and Battalion Commanders conducting operations, whether in attack or defence. Although since the War, machine-gun organization has reverted to the inclusion of one Machine-Gun Company with each Infantry Battalion, it appears that in operations on a large scale, the Brigade and Divisional machine-guns must again be placed under the command of one senior officer governing their tactical disposal. Without such organization the Brigade or Divisional Commander may be deprived of highly concentrated reserves of fire power, immediately available, offering a small target to the enemy, essentially mobile, capable of delivering a shattering blow at any given point in the attack enabling Infantry infiltration and progress, capable also of stemming the tide of an enemy success. The commander of a Division, the largest tactical unit, requires such a weapon of force and reserve in his own hands.

From my Battalion War Diary, I note that prior to the Meteren operations training had pursued the following lines : " Concealment of guns and personnel when in position. Study of ground and contour. Depth in defence. Siting of guns in order to obtain Cross Fire in front of Infantry Posts and Strong Points. Bands of fire. Close liaison of all ranks with Infantry. Proportional value of Direct and Indirect fire whether for Barrage or Harassing purposes. Use of Battalion Scouts. The value of curiosity as a military virtue (Continuous study of everything

and anybody. Why is it there? Why not? etc.). Supply, dependence on the Battalion and a central source."

In the same Diary, following Meteren, I find, also, the following observations, which remain of value: "It would appear that the most efficient method of despatching a Division ready for fighting at a moment's notice, by Tactical Trains is in the following sequence—One Brigade Group: Machine-Gun Battalion (or 3 Battalion M.G. Companies, less 1 with the leading Brigade according to present organization) with 'Fighting Limbers,' i.e. 32 four-horse four-wheeled vehicles; 64 animals of which 32 are provided with Pack saddles and can be used as Pack animals: one Brigade Group. Divisional Headquarters and Signals as decided necessary. (In present M.G. organization both the latter Brigades would be without their Machine-Gun Companies.)

"Beyond question each Machine-Gun Unit despatched by train must be accompanied by its 'Fighting Limbers.' It occurred in the operations under review that a M.G. Company marched to battle with its guns, tripods, and the few belt boxes, which could be carried by the gun team personnel, disposed in Field Kitchens of Infantry Battalions. Other Companies went into action carrying, besides guns and tripods, 6 or 8 belt boxes per gun (only) over great distances, being entirely cut off from their Transport, including adequate belt box supply, spare barrels, condensers, and ammunition.

"Without the 'Fighting Limbers' the great power of the weapon is greatly circumscribed. The importance of Machine Gunners, guns, and 'Fighting Limbers' going everywhere together is as great as the undenied importance of the guns, transport and personnel of the R.F.A. proceeding together.

"In daylight a Machine-Gun Unit, well disposed, can hold a line the length of which is determined by the size of the Unit and the contour of the ground, without Infantry support. During darkness or in thick mist this is not practicable. By his tactics of infiltration the enemy can easily penetrate a line thus held (the line is one of posts without patrols or connecting files).

"It would appear that a Machine-Gun Unit with a proportion of Infantry, definitely attached to it, can hold a line against an enemy attack. In order to save casualties and to provide an adequate reserve for counter-attack, therefore, the normal Brigade front can be held by a Machine-Gun Company, disposed in depth, with one Infantry Battalion disposed as local protection for the guns, for observation, and to deal with individual enemy

scouts, etc., leaving two Infantry Battalions intact, available for the counter-attack. The Commander of the forward Infantry Battalion and the Commander of the Machine-Gun Company must be together. (The present M.G. organization might prove such an arrangement to be embarrassing to the two commanders.)

"It seems that had the various unattached formations, thrown into the fight, been definitely allotted to Machine-Gun Units, that the line and its flanks would have been better safeguarded. Patrolling during darkness and on misty mornings would have been better carried out and the line more securely guarded; while gaps in the line could have been better supplied.

"I cannot overestimate the value of employing Scouts and Mounted Orderlies with a Battalion Headquarters. The Scouts must be specially trained, with a high *esprit de corps* peculiarly their own. They should form part of the establishment of the Battalion Headquarters, and should not be part of the Section (or platoon).

"There must be far greater co-operation and support between the light and heavy gun, the Lewis and the Vickers. During these operations, the enemy again and again contributed fine examples of how the tactics of these two weapons can be blended. The 'Battalion Snipers' seemed to be the only men whose duty it was to fire rifles. Every rifleman is a sniper.

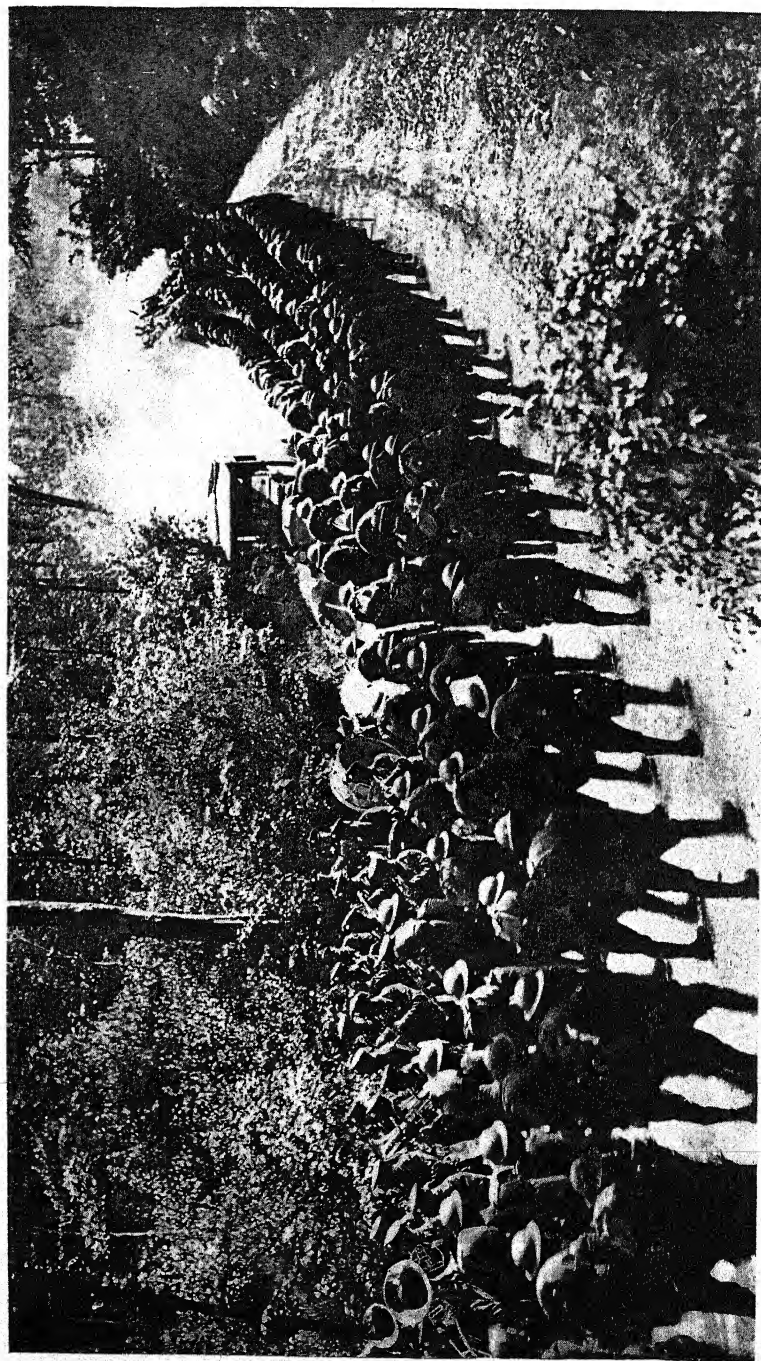
"Some bombs with the spare numbers of each Machine-Gun Team should invariably be carried for local protection. A number of surplus guns, it is suggested 6, should be definitely handed over to the Machine-Gun Battalion Commander from Ordnance as immediate reserve in case of casualties. The presence of a machine-gun on the spot may save a situation.

"The Machine-Gun Section, 4 guns, is the machine-gun fighting Unit. This must be recognized by Infantry. One gun may prove to be a 'white elephant.'

"During the operations several farm-houses were loopholed by the Royal Engineers for the Machine-Gun Corps. Such positions were not taken up. The enemy, with his preponderance of artillery on every occasion, proceeded to 'knock-out' farm-house after farm-house, inflicting heavy casualties on the occupants. It was observed that the enemy only occupied buildings which we presumed to have been demolished. Buildings which appear to the enemy to be demolished by his artillery fire, especially those with cellars, must be fortified and occupied by us whenever possible."



von Hertenberg.



AMERICAN SOLDIERS IN COLUMN OF ROUTE, ACCOMPANIED BY A BRITISH MILITARY BAND

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CHAPTER XIV

THE WEIGHTED SCALES

MAY-AUGUST 1918

America—Tactical influence—Strategic importance of entry—America, the decisive factor—"The Fourteen Points"—British and American comradeship in arms—"Doughboys" at Ypres—American military qualities—Some American personalities—Regeneration of the British Army—Finding field leaders—Leave, its habit and effect.

TAKE up our quarrel with the foe !
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch—be yours to hold it high !
If ye break faith with us who die,
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.¹

THE contribution of the United States of America on the Western Front must essentially be regarded from two entirely different standpoints, namely political and strategic on the one hand, and the tactical effort and actual fighting on the other. It does not belittle the military qualities of the American Divisions who participated in battle when it is stated that their contribution in the fighting zone was of comparatively small importance. Operations, like those of St. Mihiel and in conjunction with British troops against the Hindenburg Line, successful in degree as they were, cannot be pretended to have exercised any marked influence upon the progress of the War, or upon the defeat of Germany. The battles on the Western Front between August and the Armistice would have proceeded according to plan, and doubtless would have accomplished the same objectives, whether American troops had been present or not. That is the tactical consideration, but, paradoxically, and in apparent contradiction, it is equally clear that without the presence of American troops it is improbable that the Allied Drive would have proceeded as it did. And it is still more doubtful whether the Armistice, following collapse, would have intervened to prevent a further winter campaign, and a war of

¹ From "In Flanders Fields," by Colonel John McCrae.

considerably longer duration. That is the consideration of strategy.

The importance of the moral factor bound up with America's entry into the War on the Allied side can hardly be overestimated. The appearance of fresh and eager troops, filled with self-confidence, well equipped, and of fine physique, provided the Allies with a stimulus beyond compare. Those familiar with military history, also, were confident that the successors to those who with such skill and courage had conducted the campaigns of the American Civil War, although lacking training and experience of modern conditions, would prove to be troops of the highest fighting quality.

What the Allies realized in the accession of America, instructed opinion in Germany understood as a weight beyond counter-balance thrown into the scales against the chance, severely diminished after April 1918, for the Central Powers of bringing the War to a successful conclusion. American opposition, even with the restraint of President Wilson's enunciation as to the political objective sought, deprived Germany of any but the most slender hopes of an agreed peace. The advent of American troops, both on account of the untold numbers which America could produce, and of the stimulus provided among the Allies, brought defeat on the battlefield very close to war-weary German soldiers, so that it stared them in the face.

The influence of America was, therefore, a moral one. Nor can it be too often repeated that "in war moral force is to physical as is three to one." That so few Americans were called upon to play any active part in battle is no cause for minimising the part which they did play; nor long after the Armistice for a querulous criticism of bombastic claims made in some quarters that "America won the War."

In a strategic sense it cannot be denied that the entry of the United States on the Allied side was the decisive factor. It gave heart to France, when among the Allies the French politicians especially were very doubtful of the possibility of success to their arms; and when the British, greatly exhausted from the German hammer blows of March and April 1918, though not discouraged by their great losses in a stand which must be regarded as a success for British arms, were neither equipped nor were in a mood for further offensive action. France was willing to "sit tight": Great Britain could do no more. Germany, having suffered prodigious losses, felt the urgent need of a shorter defensive line, and was prepared to evacuate a large part of the

invaded territory in order to accomplish this object ; and then to " dig in " and treat for peace, one which would be agreed.

The entry of the Americans contributed to Marshal Foch the lever which his strategic belief required, indeed a flail with which to goad forward both doubting politicians and wary subordinates. " *Marcher aux canons* " became a possibility only because young America, a child in war, youthfully adventuresome in its personnel, was the whip which Foch showmanship could crack to encourage the Allied troops to perform their old tricks, and which terrified the growling enemy across the dividing bars of the trenches.

America did not win the War by any feat of arms, but by the presence of her troops in France and by the threat of a million more to come. America accomplished the Armistice as much through Wilson's " Fourteen Points " as by the fact of placing a million fresh combatants at the disposal of the Allies. The effect of the publication of the " Fourteen Points " in Germany upon German soldiers could only be estimated long after the Armistice. Their impression, with profound reverberations, only began to suggest to the world so long as a decade later that, in the " Peace Terms," Germany had expected something different from an Allied interpretation of those Points. They were a main cause of Germany's laying down arms, but it is difficult to find them as implemented in the Treaty of Versailles.

But the " Fourteen Points," no less than the entry of American troops in the field, provided Foch with additional strength to wield his whip, once he had crossed the fortified Hindenburg Line and strode in among an enemy, which, though yet growling, retreated before his blows. In the realm of strategy the American entry, with the portent of its " Fourteen Points," embraced at the time by the Allies, was the factor decisive of victory. Thus the power of moral force.

But having said so much, as will be seen the British victory of arms, outweighing as it does the part played by the French, is in no way diminished. Nevertheless, small as was the share of the American soldier in that victory, the portrait of the Warrior would be wholly incomplete without some record of, and just tribute to, the American soldier on the battlefield. Fortunate, indeed, am I that in writing of him I speak with first-hand knowledge.

It is without doubt true that the influence of the British soldier on the American was infinitely greater than that of the American on the British. On their first arrival in the forward area it was

quite astonishing to see hard-bitten American soldiers, in the prime of adult life, receiving official instruction, or merely learning by gossip, from English boys scarcely out of their teens. What the Americans were to know of war on the Western Front, before they entered into the fray, we largely taught them. And it was as pleasant an apprenticeship both for the novitiates and their instructors as ever men underwent.

General Pershing, who commanded the American troops in the field, has complained in his Memoirs that the morale of the British troops to whom those of his command were attached for instruction was very low. He even suggests that such lack in fighting quality in the instructors had an adverse effect upon the quality of his own troops. The impeachment is wholesale. This statement must be answered, and can be denied by an American Commanding Officer who, writing to me on the last day of his own period of instruction and that of his Battalion with my own in the front defences of Ypres in June 1918 has conveyed his appreciation in terms wholly dissimilar from those of his Commander-in-Chief. Let him speak :

"It appears, to our great sorrow, that our Battalion is about to be relieved from duty with your troops, and I trust that you will permit me to express to you and your most efficient Officers my deep and sincere appreciation of the most thorough and excellent instruction which you have given us during these three short weeks, and also to thank you for the many courtesies that you have rendered us, and the kindest and most chivalrous hospitality which you and your Officers have shown us.

"It is very gratifying for me to observe the marked improvement in the Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers and Men under the guidance and tutorship of you and your most worthy Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers.

"I would also like to thank the rank and file of your enlisted men for their deep interest and untiring efforts in the instruction of our men. . . . I am sure that the American Officers over us have observed the great improvement which has been brought about through our instruction under your Command. . . ."

The much heralded entry of the Americans had begun to make itself apparent by the arrival in the forward area in January 1918 of a group of American Generals. I remember my first meeting with them in the Ramparts at Ypres, when I had come to Divisional Headquarters to make a report. But a few moments earlier the Divisional Commander, warned of their arrival, had left his Headquarters to greet them, and discovered

a group of Americans seated on their baggage in the Square before the Cloth Hall. He shook each warmly by the hand, discovering at once that these were not the Generals, but their servants. "No matter," exclaimed the Divisional Commander, "you are equally welcome."

And this touch commenced a friendship with American soldiers, between all ranks on both sides, which quickly ripened to affection. It is, indeed, surprising that prior to the War the two greatest English speaking communities of Britain and America can have known so little of one another, and that such a small "duckpond" as is the Atlantic can have been so large a barrier between the most democratic nations in the world, possessed of so many common institutions.

That the American troops were ignorant of military strategy they themselves would be the first to admit. They did admit it. Especially did they imagine that Staff work and Generalship were matters of business in the commercial sense. Experience, however, very soon taught them that the successful business man is not necessarily equipped with all the qualifications necessary to lead an Army, or a Battalion, with success in the field. On the other hand, if he is willing to learn, his business training will be invaluable to him.

We had expected, also, that the soldier from the States would be an expert shot both with rifle and revolver, and a master of scoutcraft. This was by no means invariably so. We probably had formed this impression, not knowing the true American, from having seen the native of the United States presented to us as an expert with the gun in a saloon bar on the "Movies." As we knew the American nation in no other way, we could only picture the American soldier as a gentleman in a wide-brimmed hat aiming sly shots at peaceful drinkers; rifling their pockets; disappearing into the fastnesses of the mountains of Arizona, and directing well-aimed rifle-fire upon an army of policemen, while skilfully avoiding capture for many months; and eventually ending his dramatic career by marrying the daughter of the Sheriff!

While the physique of the men from the mountains of Carolina was uniformly magnificent—probably no finer specimens of the white race exist in the world than the "Tar Heels"—the physique of those American Divisions drawn from the cities called for no remark. In fact, it may be generally said that the physique of the hillman of Carolina was of an average with that of our countrymen, while the "New Yorker" averaged with the men of our Regiments drawn from the towns. After the ravages

which had been wrought upon our manhood, particularly during the Somme, Arras, and Ypres operations, we had expected to see an army far more virile than that of our own enter the field. It was not so. In age and maturity undoubtedly the Americans were better able, perhaps, to withstand the shock and horrors of war, but what our own troops lacked in this respect they certainly gained in experience and in boyish light-heartedness. It was not an uncommon sight to see a lad of nineteen or twenty summers, wearing one blue chevron upon his arm, surrounded by a keenly interested group of hoary old mountaineers from the heart of the Great Smoky Mountains. Between these hard-bitten men and our lads there soon sprang up an affection, in which there was no place for either mistrust or suspicion. The American officers were enthusiastic. The American men were, if they came from the towns, quick and anxious to learn ; if they came from the country, slow, but most anxious to "get at the Boche" with the bayonet.

These latter could in no way understand any reason for delay in carrying this out on a grand scale, and chafed at the weeks in which they had so rapidly to learn all that we had acquired during the past three and a half years.

In many respects it was difficult for us to appreciate that the American Army was representative of a great Democracy. Certainly, when it arrived in the field such institutions as Officers' and Sergeants' Messes did not exist ; but, on the other hand, saluting was even more perfunctorily carried out than in the British Army of that time. While in our Army, the Officer most often worked beside and with his men, and the Non-Commissioned Officer invariably so, in the American Army we were informed that it was not the custom for Sergeants to perform manual work beside the men under their command. To us this was a most extraordinary custom in an Army which had proclaimed that it was essentially democratic. While it was undemocratic for a Battalion Commander to cook, let alone have cooked for him, his ration of pork and beans, or to cut his bread with any knife other than that issued, it was quite democratic for him to stand and watch his men at work. This state of affairs, however, did not last long, for we soon showed to our American brothers that we, too, had "figured" the problem of democracy, even if in our own insular fashion ; and while we culled fresh ideas and inventiveness from the mountains and prairies of the States, the "Tar Heels" gained daily in experience and in knowledge of our democracy, founded upon Freedom, as was

his own ; fashioned in the hills of India, on the burning plains of the Sudan, in the kopjes of South Africa, and in the fastnesses of Canada and Australia ; and, finally, matured Imperially, in the teeth of common danger, in the face of a common foe.

On the 15th of July, just two years after our first big plunge into modern warfare on the grand scale, the advance-guard of the 30th American Division arrived. Their advent had been announced loudly long before it came about. Rumour was at least a month ahead of them ; but when they appeared it was as a complete invasion. The roads, villages, such as they were, estaminets and pasture fields swarmed with men in the tightest trousers and smallest hats with which man throughout the ages has ever been fitted out. Upon their backs, so it appeared, they carried an immense pantechnicon consisting of three blankets, a folding tent, revolver, rifle, knives, a teaset complete, half a dozen pairs of socks, shirts, underwear for winter and summer weather, family photographs, and finally pictures of the Statue of Liberty and of President Wilson, and ten packets of chewing gum. In order to lighten their equipment many of our men not only assisted to unburden these sky-scraping monstrosities, but relieved the Americans of them in such a fashion that they would never again be required to carry anything but their arms and ammunition. Meanwhile British soldiers regaled themselves with chewing gum beneath a Californian tent ! Thus, scrounging.

The Plenipotentiaries arrived *en masse*, and struck me at first glance as a concourse of very grave men, probably suppressed within their extremely tight uniforms. There was much saluting, hand-shaking, and introductions, a diversion being made by the various Drum, Brass, and Pipe Bands in full war-paint, which vigorously played the "Star Spangled Banner," or in the case of the pipes the nearest approach to this air which could be improvised by a nimble-brained Pipe Major. Bag-pipes provided the Cock-o'-the-North in rag-time interspersed with the air of this favourite American melody.

Remarkable amongst the Americans were some personalities. There was one Battalion Commander whose whimsical mannerisms and quaint humour endeared him to all ranks. Tours round the line with him were always full of interest. To all one had to say he gave a grave attention. He never lost the grim humour of the thing. The loud report at dead of night of a battery of ours would only provoke from him the caustic injunction, hardly audible, "Give 'em HELL !"

Very different was his Second-in-Command. He was as bulky

and rubicund as his Commander was lean and pale. He expended so much energy in talking and laughing that he had none left for his legs, which, so rotund was he, could scarcely carry his body. Accordingly, like Diogenes, he remained in his dugout, and from its darknesses delivered oracular judgment on the War. He was a great politician. He claimed to know the price of every man's vote in North Carolina.

The real American, as we had pictured him, did not arrive in our midst until a week or two later. We had decided that these quiet-thinking men of North Carolina were not all the popular type of "Yankee." Some of them were even proud to claim English descent! We wanted to justify our conception of the slack-jawed, keen-eyed man of quaint jargons and turns of speech that Mark Twain and others had introduced to us.

When Captain English, so appropriately named, arrived, we knew immediately that "the goods had been delivered." His first introduction was to unpeel before our eyes a cunningly twisted packet of chewing-gum; and on noticing our admiring gaze as he capaciously took it between his jaws, his hand produced sundry other packets which he proceeded to hand round. Then, while we all chewed, he narrated his complete philosophical scheme with reference to the Canal Sector and the American attachment. He had "cottoned on" to the whole thing within five minutes. He only wanted the practical experience. He was here to learn. We could do what we liked with him or his "mob." We were the right stuff: he saw that clearly. His journey up to Smyth Farm had been a series of quixotic experiences, such as had come to no other man living. He had been blown up by a gas shell, and by a miracle had adjusted his box respirator before reaching the ground. He had seen all colours of Vérey lights in the sky, and had theories on the use of each one of them. He had floundered about in ditches and shell-holes until he had completely lost direction, but with unique forethought he had measured the bearing from nowhere to Smyth Farm, and by his trusty compass, which had never failed him in all preceding campaigns, he had at last attained his objective. Despite a forty-mile march that day, he was prepared to go round the Canal Sector this very night and learn what there was to learn.

And, to do him justice, he did learn, and quickly, too. He seemed to jump to the idea at once. The technicalities of the science of war were to him matters of intense interest. He absorbed everything, as do Englishmen.

The rank and file were slow, even lethargic, but they were

inspired with a most intense hate for the Hun, and always expressed a keen desire to go over the top and be at him. They took an almost childish interest in the effect of our shelling. One Sergeant, in particular, used to peer continuously over the parapet, at the same time remarking, "Say, Loo-tenant, she shure is hitting them some." This was the only remark he was ever known to pass.

This was a period in which we not only succeeded in teaching to our new Allies, the Americans, all that we had learned with so much loss and agony during the past four years, but in which we took stock of our past faults, and prepared, after this brief respite, to get out of our chair, drive the enemy against the ropes and into the corner, and administer a series of smashing blows until he was down and out.

The military machine was perfected in every detail. If we suffered from any weakness it was only from lack of Field Commanders. An enormous drain had been made upon our Battalion and Company Commanders, through death, wounds, or exhaustion, and they were very difficult to replace. The Cadet system of training at home, however, found men from the ranks, which in no other way could have been discovered. Warrant Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers who had shown gallantry and talent for leadership in the field were selected from every Battalion and formation in the Field Army. For the first time these men were selected for fighting qualities alone, and were sent to the Cadet Battalions, and within a very short period came back to take their places as officers, often as not in their old Battalions. Very often young men, as Second-Lieutenants, were selected immediately to command Companies and Battalions in the field. It was possible that, possessed of good fighting qualities, a man might be promoted from the rank of Second-Lieutenant to Lieutenant-Colonel within a few months. The Army gained immeasurably from this new determination.

Notwithstanding the ravages of influenza which during the early summer of 1918 smote the Army, as it did those at home, a boyish lightheartedness reappeared. Boxing tournaments, sports, cricket, football, and basket ball, even close behind the lines, were the fashion of the hour.

Special attention was paid to the Rear Echelon and transport lines so that there should be comfortable places in which the troops from the line could live while in rest. Of this Dirty Bucket Camp, why so named no one knew, and Boone Camp, were the most popular.

Our personal friends and students, the Americans, were greatly impressed with our sports. Upon one occasion whereon we vied with them in sport, a typical "Son-of-a-Gun" spat a black stream of tobacco juice accurately through the eye of a cleaning-rod at ten yards, to show us a stunt we could not do. Nor did we attempt to match him.

Since the Battle of the Lys we had received very large numbers of reinforcements, especially from the Young Soldiers' Battalions at home. At no time in its history has the Army presented to the world a finer body of men, physically and mentally, than these splendid youths. There yet remained a sufficiency of trained and experienced soldiers to leaven this youth into a magnificent army. By the date that the Division was withdrawn to take its part in Foch's final great offensive, it was never in finer fettle, nor more prepared for offensive action.

Unpleasant as the Ypres Salient always was, it was, during brilliant weather, a scholastic and athletic paradise. A number of raids, also, were carried out opposite to Voormezele and from Scottish Wood. We tried a number of experiments also with gas, and for some time with the Division was the G.H.Q. "Frightfulness" Officer. While he cheerfully discharged volumes of poisonous gas which belched forth from specially constructed cylinders on the light railway, he read to us, for he had been a theological student, a treatise upon the immortality of the soul.

At the latter end of August the Division was relieved by the 50th American Division. Leaving Scottish Wood, Swan Château, and the lakes of Zillebeke and of Dickebusch to the Americans, and handing to them also the excellent encampments which we had built at St. Jan der Biezen, Ouderdom, and at Poperinghe, we went into training quarters in a back area to refit and prepare for Foch's great offensive.

The lull between battles, the months of June and July, wherein both sides were exhausted, with the appearance, also, of the Americans, for whom room had to be found in our lines, provided an opportunity for an extension of leave facilities. If a sufficient number of warrants could not be procured for home, at least a Commanding Officer could allow his men some days of holiday and relaxation for a jaunt to Paris or to the Base. Leave for once became almost fashionable; and every one of those who had survived the Meteren battle were sent by me for a holiday.

Leave of absence, known generically and in the military vocabulary as "leave," though almost universally pronounced

"leaf" by the rank and file, was an established principle. Leave was anxiously awaited, and became the landmark of time. It was sought for, prayed for. But only once every five months, and often far longer periods, did the golden opportunity for leave come round. Leave was an escape, even better than a "Blighty," although its period of duration was but fleeting. How anxiously did the heart of man beat, when laden with his equipment, everything which he possessed in a world of war, he turned from the front or support line down the communication trench, whose alleyway led first to Boulogne.

"Going on leave." How man hurried. How keenly were his ears attuned to whistling shells, as he dodged and ducked and shrank lest some particle of flying metal should intervene and cancel leave. And when he reached the track or macadamless road, how he sweated in his haste to reach the *pavé*. And when on the *pavé* how he sped to reach the rail-head, almost, if not quite, beyond gun-fire. Going on leave meant lorry jumping, hanging on behind like an urchin in a city crowd, or waving at the roadside to willing drivers who would pull up and give to Atkins, shrouded in mud, a well-earned lift to somewhere hard by which lay the station from which the leave train would go out.

Leave was the only break in what for most was the monotony of war, and it implied the magic magnetism which is home.

But how often was leave, long awaited, snatched in its hour of arrival by some sudden, urgent duty, a new offensive, a raid and an attack by the enemy. Leave was as uncertain as it was fleeting. Though for senior officers, and especially the Staff, these holidays came round with almost certain frequency.

The leave train, except at periods of stress, went down to Boulogne almost daily from all the main centres of activity. Its carriages were packed with men as they each had come from the trenches and the battery positions. At Boulogne one could almost tell from which sectors men had come by the colour of the stains upon their clothing. Ypres, with its yellow slime, the chalk of the Somme uplands, the blacker mud of Artois. Men were unwashed, with tousled hair, often unshaven, marked with weariness, but glowing with happiness like children proceeding on a school-treat.

Each officer was possessed of a yellow paper ticket, each man one green, the passport to home.

Leave was first made generally possible in the New Year of 1915, and from this date it became universal, virtually a right. Only Field Punishment could lawfully prolong the period

between one leave and another ; though there was many a well-behaved soldier to whom leave came only once a year, unless wounds intervened.

It was an additional cause for quarrel between the fighting man and those who held Staff appointments that the latter fared better in the matter of leave than did those who incurred the greater risk. And an aggravation of the cause was that many Staff officers, making use of Staff cars, could hurry along the national roads to Boulogne, and steal an extra day's leave against the fighting troops whose train, often placed on sidings to admit the passage of those carrying wounded and munitions, wandered slowly through the countryside to the Base.

The Staff Sergeants who held the gangways on to the daily leave boat from Boulogne would admit the passage of even a very junior officer, wearing the red facings of the Staff, although one day in advance of his leave, where others, who had been fortunate in the hour of their arrival, were held over for a day and forced to kick their heels in one of the hotels, clubs, and shelters of Boulogne. It was said that the suitable and appropriate transfer of money worked wonders with the gangway, and that more than one of those, who examined leave warrants before men could board the leave boats, had accumulated considerable fortunes. I do not know. Little souvenirs and trinkets collected from the trenches, and such prizes as German helmets, which, apart from their sentimental interest, would fetch a high price among collectors at home, were taken, if detected, from men boarding the leave boats. These things were often cunningly concealed in the pack and rolled in overcoats ; but the detectives, especially following a successful battle, seemed to be possessed of high skill in finding such souvenirs and took them away. It was said that they sold them afterwards, and from this source, also, accumulated large fortunes. The " Base Wallahs," as those who formed the services far behind the lines were termed, deserved much of the approbrium showered on their heads, if only because the righteous among them took no active part in "cleansing the stables" and in removing causes for abuse.

At Folkestone, the port of disembarkation, almost unheeding those who stood at the gangway, men stormed down the planks and rushed the waiting leave train. Within a few minutes of its having berthed, the leave train steamed out. But those minutes were all too long.

For most men leave gave little satisfaction. We talked in a language and of things scarcely understood by those at home. Though they showered comforts and affection upon us we were irritable and difficult to please. It was with impatience that we endured the small talk of the home, dismissing questions as to our own lives and experience with a shrug. Most of all we wished to be left alone, displaying an uncanny discourtesy and lack of interest in all those things which but a few months earlier had been the very hub of life's existence. Our hearts, at least half of them, remained across the Channel, though we knew it not, with boon companions, bearing our part, in absence, of the burden of the battle.

London especially, and the larger towns, seemed unfriendly, except with their hectic artificiality. No one wanted to think about the man "over there." Beyond the imagination of those at home was the Armageddon of the Western Front. So many only seemed to want the sympathy of the man returned for their own sufferings from the anxiety of air raids, and the inconvenience of food tickets. The attitude of those at home was born of "inferiority complex" and of jealousy. Sometimes the presence of men on leave was almost resented. We were sensitive, but we could not understand the attitude. Only most, perhaps, did men want love, the primæval instinct calling from out of war's hermitage.

Everyone was very busy: work of national importance; organizing this and that, or being organized. We did not come into the picture and in consequence spoiled its composition. There was nothing to do, except to go to theatres, restaurants, kinemas, dances. We could listen to relatives who gathered round, or upon whom we paid duty calls to fill up time. But there was nothing to say. Our lives "over there" were beyond their ken.

Only in the countryside, perhaps, could we find the solace which was needed. Trees, hills, rolling downs, quiet valleys wreathed in blue haze, squat villages, meadows with red and white cows, deep woods: our England, our Scotland, our Wales, our Ireland. The soil from which we sprang and in which we hoped, by some miracle of escape from war, to lie. And yet,

"over there," a great life lay only just beyond the pale of common thought. "Over there" implied the crossing to that soul Eternity into which had entered so many friends and companions, most intimate, who shared the new life and thought to which those who remained at home were so blinded.

The parting on the last day of leave was far more bitter and pathetic for those left behind than for those who, with a jest, waved from the windows of the leave train as it drew its load of Warriors from the sight of those who stood on the platforms of Victoria Station.

Leave, so eagerly sought, so hardly bought, for too many was almost empty of its consolations.

Some went to Paris for three or five days. Money flowed, and money could buy almost anything. The Folies Bergères did a roaring trade, its foyers packed with soldiers, French, British, Americans, Russians, Belgians, Portuguese, Annamites, Chinese. And all the Allies were to be found *Chez Henri* and at the Café de la Paix, and strolling in the Boulevard des Italiens. But Paris was only a gross expansion of Amiens. Men went to Paris to dismiss the compelling memory of mud and death, and to find forgetfulness in champagne, the music-hall, and a hectic life.

I spent a memorable five days in a village near Caen. I wished to get far away from all the business of war and from the business of being busy at home. Here, in the quiet of Normandy, war seemed utterly remote. The peasants tilled their fields to-day as yesterday. A British soldier before they had never seen in the flesh. They accepted me as I came with scarce a comment. I fished in the stream, talked with the curé, and with those who sat at twilight sipping cider. They were kind, so ignorant of war that they could utter no words which sensed its actuality; and dismissed an allusion to the passing of some son of the village with a shrug of the shoulder, in the fatalists' phrase: "*C'est la guerre.*" And they would talk of simple things. Such leave was indeed refreshment.

Of leave, one story from among many almost classically associated with the name of "Hunter-Bunter," can appropriately be written.

The daily leave train for the Ypres Sector was lying on a siding at Vlamertinghe awaiting its convoy, as men proceeding ~~on~~ leave came in singly and in twos and threes to the rail-head. It was Christmas Eve.

Sir Aylmer Hunter Weston, the Corps Commander, always so punctilious in his appearances, and sometimes so surprising,

descended on the leave train to bid those under his command going away at this festive season "A merry Christmas." Snow lay on the ground, and a bitter wind carried icy particles in its cold embrace. Already, before the Corps Commander's arrival, the train was filled. In each carriage, packed almost beyond capacity, men, behind closed doors, had shut out the ferocity of the winter's night, generating within a human fug, warm and kindly.

Preceded by an aide-de-camp "Hunter-Bunter" walked the length of the train. Each carriage door was flung open by the A.D.C., and with that familiar preface to all such orations "Hunter-Bunter" addressed those within: "I, Sir Aylmer Hunter Weston, your Corps Commander . . . wish you a merry Christmas!"

At one carriage an aggravated soul burst in reply, which came back swift as a sniper's shot: "And I, the blinking Prince of Wales, wish you'd shut that blinking door."

CHAPTER XV

INDESTRUCTIBLE COHESION

SEPTEMBER 1918

Leadership in battle—The unified command—Political influences—The study of war—Comparison of battles on Western Front with those of history—"Marcher aux canons"—German rear-guard actions—The faith of Foch—Unity, the strategic necessity—The Drive to the East—A thunderstorm—Transport difficulties against the Hindenburg Line—Bitter fighting—Wounded—A tactical tragedy.

THUNDER,
The gallop of innumerable Valkyrie impetuous for battle,
The beating of vast eagle wings above Prometheus,
The contest of tall barbaric gods smitten by the hammer of Thor,
Pursuit ! Pursuit ! Pursuit !
The huge black dogs of hell
Leaping full-mouthed in murderous pursuit !¹

IT is an extraordinarily difficult task that of leadership in modern warfare. Those who would understand something of its potency must perhaps first be instructed in psychology in its widest sense. For the exercise of the powers or gifts of leadership imply the swaying, directing, and attracting of others by controls beyond rank, penalty, reward, military law and organization. Personal example is a part of the necessary power. Bravery by itself produces neither confidence nor enthusiasm. Reckless courage may, indeed, destroy hope and supplant it by despair. But the leader who is both brave and "knows his job" will always find strong support.

There is in some men, also, an indefinable quality radiating from the physical being, streaming in emanations from the dynamic mind, which sets these men as commanders of troops in the field upon a high pedestal. These are those of whom subordinates do say : "I would follow him to Hell." Yet the peculiar character of these men is beyond definition. They are

¹ From "Barrage," by Richard Aldington.

recognized, known, loved. No one can express just what qualities and variations in character go to make up the type. It is said of some, "He is a born leader." Surely that is the secret of this subtlety in character, a vividness of personality, magnetic, vibrant, resonant. The Divine spark. Power.

The man who knows his job has the honour of leadership conferred upon him, though he be not loved, perhaps even hated. But he who combines knowledge with the inborn gift of leadership may lead armies or platoons to victory.

Even so, the very physical difficulties of the modern battlefield, the noise, the smoke, raise new barriers between the leader and the led, even in so small a formation as the Battalion. The inspiration of leadership, the impression of confidence in wisdom and knowledge must, therefore, be imposed during periods of training and of rest. Herein self-denial and sacrifice are demanded of the officer. Rather than segregate himself from troops he must seek every opportunity, employ every artifice, to make himself at one with them. Only so may his spirit remain to dominate the action of weaker brethren in battle. Though at the point of test he may not be seen, his presence will be felt, his courage cast out fear, his wisdom guide the feet and hands. From his command post the leader who has attuned himself to the commoner clay of his soldiers can by his will impel them to victory, compel them to resist to the last round of ammunition, the last flicker of life.

The name of Marshal Foch may not be acclaimed by the historian as a great captain. His stature as a strategist is far below that of Napoleon, as also is that of Haig far less than that of Marlborough and Wellington. But it is true that the wars of a century ago produced greater political opportunity for strategic movement, giving to the marches of Napoleon and of Wellington a halo of strategic enterprise in favourable comparison with the immovable anvil of the Western Front. A paradox, perhaps, in an era of unprecedented development of transport services.

The unified command under Foch, in March 1918, discovered an immediate response among the Warriors. No doubt this was due in part to relief from a command which had pursued Passchendaele, for it is doubtful if a dozen British soldiers had ever seen Foch in the flesh, or would have recognized again the short aggressive figure. Logic, so often remorseless as in the attitude of France to Treaty making and in her conduct in International Affairs since the Armistice in 1918, is so marked a characteristic

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of the French mind that the behaviour of Marshal Foch is sometimes surprising. His impetuous will almost invariably divorced his strategy from the logic of a military situation.

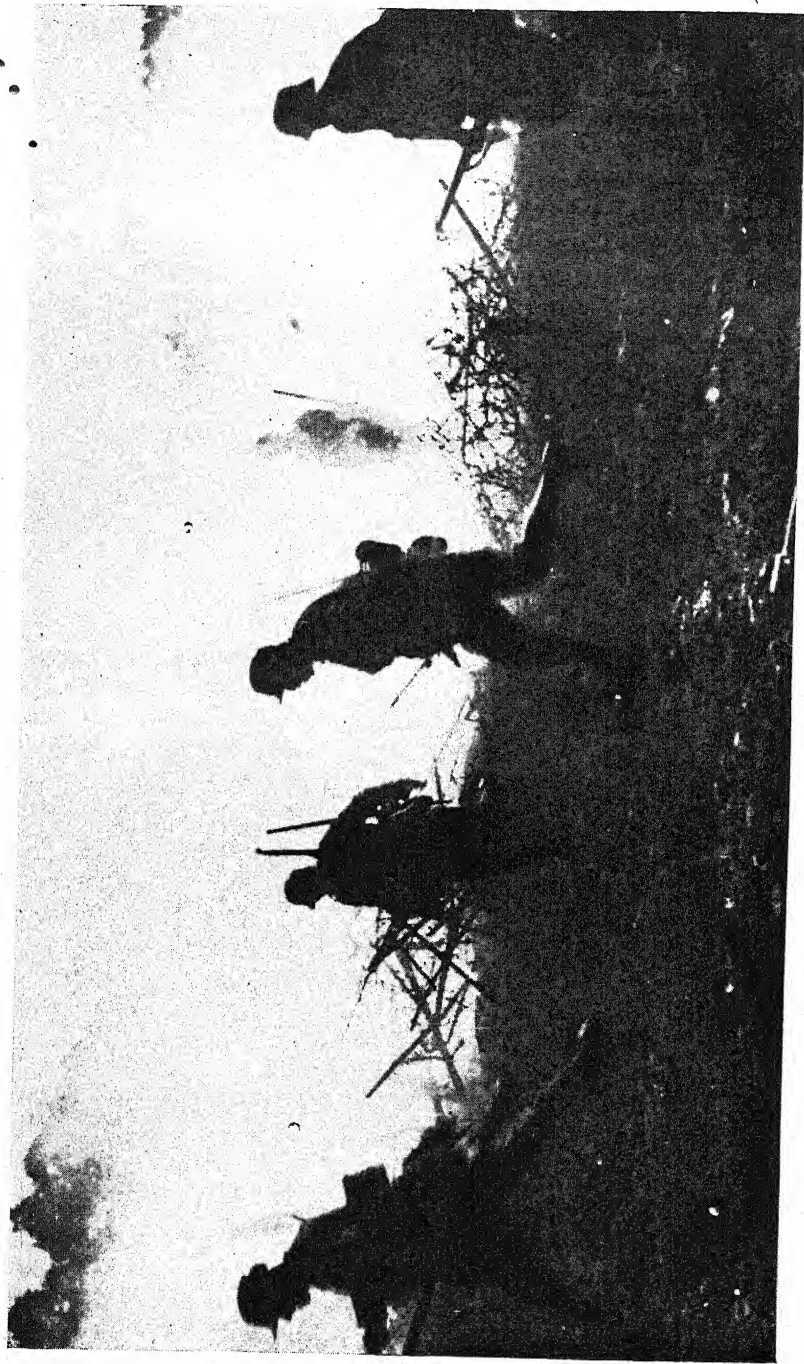
Yet it is of such a will that victories are made. The logician would have demanded this and that, would have said "this must take place before I can accomplish that." The logic of Ferdinand Foch was the will to win alone. From the confused reports and often highly contradictory memoirs of those who were associated with him, it will always be difficult to state with any kind of surety in how far the fixed determination of Marshal Foch brought victory to the Allied troops. But every great writer upon the art of war has insisted that moral quality is the highest factor to success. The one aim of Foch was to strike the Boche, to kill the Boche, to drive the Boche from the frontiers of France. Subordinating all other considerations to this end he strove with all his physical and mental being. And to strengthen his will, he daily, and often publicly, gave himself to devotional prayer. Though the brusque and discourteous manner of the Generalissimo may have irritated and exasperated politicians and generals alike, nevertheless, possessed also of an astute mind, he impelled them to do his will.

War is a ruthless business. The man who would win battles cannot stand on ceremony with either subordinates or allies. Where he does so he only fools with time and opportunity. This latter waits not for diplomacy.

The strategic situation in 1918 demanded a unified command. But that alone would not have sufficed to meet a situation fraught with direst peril. The will to victory was most required. This with brain and heart, with every word he uttered, with each emphatic gesticulation, Foch provided. The causes of victory and of defeat in war are of supreme interest. Throughout all history it will be found that they are vested in the character of the Commander in the field.

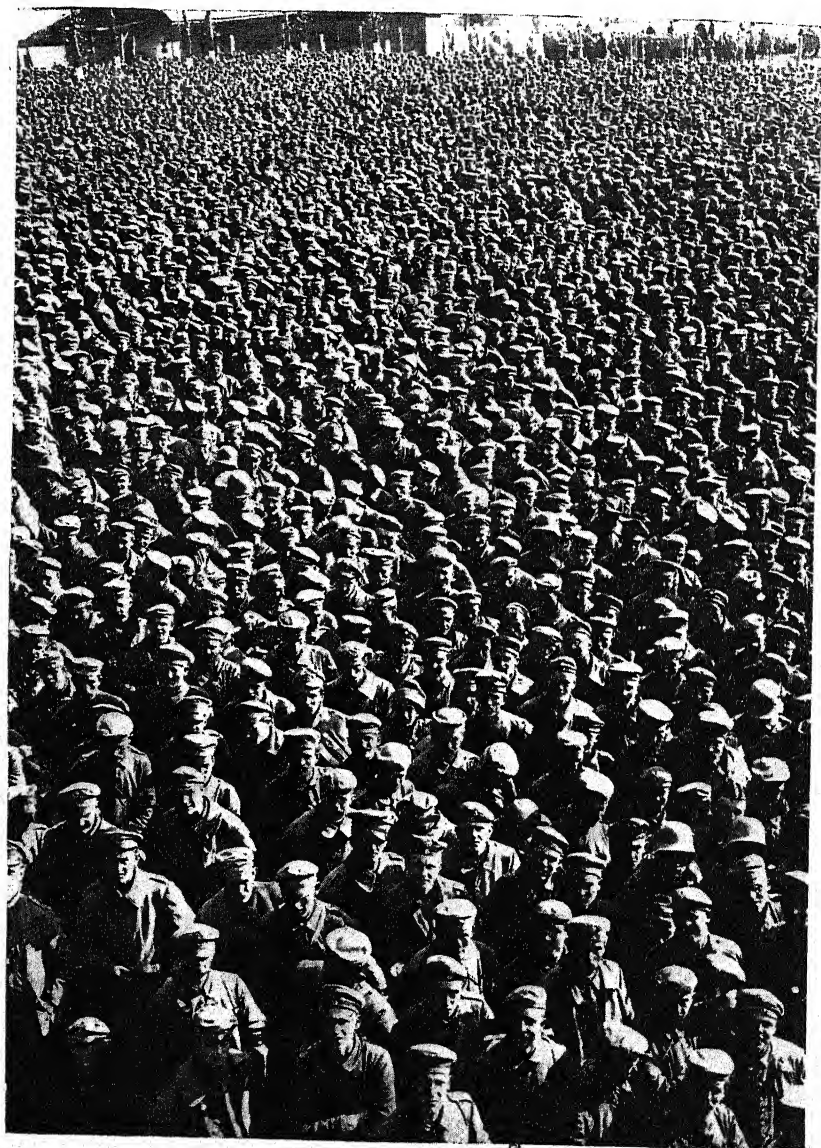
In the post-war years gratitude may have ascribed to the American troops a share wholly undue in a victory of military arms. In the final battles between August and November 1918, in which every British and Dominion Division on the Western Front was engaged, troops already many times tried in battle, but a few American Divisions, those only so far available for offensive action, played any part whatsoever. As a military instrument the forces of the United States of America were comparatively small in the picture of victory.

Nevertheless, the moral factor, namely, that hundreds of



GERMAN TROOPS IN THE COUNTER-ATTACK

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PRISONERS OF WAR

thousands, perhaps millions, of men available as reinforcement to the Allies on the Western Front, together with limitless wealth and munitions, without doubt remains the supreme cause in Germany's defeat. Pershing's offensive at St. Mihiel perhaps served to test his troops, and at least to give experience to himself and to his staffs. Its strategic effect was of little importance, not as a feat of arms, but as a decisive political factor. But the fact that American soldiers, fresh, virile, well-armed and accoutred, permeated the back areas and were seen for instructional purposes among the Allies holding the line, produced a moral effect almost miraculous. The very similarity of their uniforms, khaki and basin-shaped steel helmets, and not least the kinship of language, gave the impression to British troops that numberless reinforcements were available to carry through the Big Drive to the German frontiers. It was this factor in the highest degree which impelled the British Divisions against the hitherto impregnable Hindenburg Line, overwhelmed it after enormous losses, but with the capture of thousands of prisoners and guns; and then urged them forward to refight the old battlefields of Mons and Le Câteau two days before the Armistice.

But great as was the significance of the first fruits of American patriotism in our midst, the unquenchable spirit of Marshal Foch, controlling all, directing all, impelling all, was the first cause of victory to the Allied arms. His military decisions may be open to criticism; and his manner and attitude towards the British soldiers who saved Paris, perhaps France, in 1914, and but for their presence would perhaps in 1917 have found France in the throes of revolution, are unpardonable. But these are things of which the soldiers in the field possessed no knowledge. What we did know was that a man of the highest military reputation, a successful leader of troops in the field, a man of vigour and determination, had been appointed to organize for victory, to the supreme command over all. That was the guarantee which British troops required, even if the offensive decision involved new frontal attacks against entrenched positions fenced with wire and held by machine-guns.

It is not suggested that there was not to be found in the British Army a man capable of the supreme command on the Western Front. That man was not Haig. Political circumstance, subordinate rank, especially a far-flung battle line impeded any other choice. And of first importance was the fact that the battlefield was in France. Foch, perhaps Pétain, was the man for the task on the Western Front. But, be it remembered that

Britain has given to the world great captains, and will give them again.

Leadership in the field, whether it affects the persons of high or subordinate commanders, is a question of courage, mental as well as physical, of knowledge, and of some indefinable spiritual quality capable of keying and pinning the will to its objective, the capture of a post or the conquest of a territory.

Leadership is of such vital importance that it merits some further discussion. There was already available much knowledge and teaching, especially from the campaigns of the American Civil and the Franco-German Wars of the nineteenth century, in both of which high qualities of generalship had been displayed. What was a strategic truth in 1870 remained so in 1916. The tactical wisdom of 1864 was fundamentally good sense for the battles of 1914 to 1918. Fire power alone had increased in volume, range, and accuracy. The attainment of superiority of fire, and the breaching of the enemy line of resistance are the factors which govern decisions in war. Tactically, the battles of the Franco-German, the Russo-Turkish, and the American Civil Wars remain as safe a basis for study to-day as they did prior to the Great War.

Inventions such as the tank, automatic rifles, long-range artillery, and aerial reconnaissance, together with an all-round improvement in weapons have added new forces to these factors, and not one has been eliminated. The student of war will be poorly equipped if he confines his reading alone to the history of the campaigns between 1914 and 1918. Books are the store-houses of all human knowledge. Following the custom of savage tribes it might be possible to pass on by word of mouth certain elementary customs and rules for behaviour. But in a technical sense it would be as impossible to pass verbally from one generation to another the mechanical complexities of the tank or artillery fuses, let alone the principles of war, as it would be to enunciate in the forum of the school Einstein's Theory of Relativity without the support of the written word. Throughout history the great military leaders have recognized the necessity for study.

Frederick the Great twitted those officers who relied alone on war experience with the phrase: "There are in the Army two commissariat mules which have served through twenty campaigns, but they are mules still." Sir Charles Napier writing to a young officer expressed himself thus: "By reading you will be distinguished; without it, abilities are of little use. A man cannot learn his profession without constant study to prepare

especially for the higher ranks. When in a post of responsibility he has no time to read ; and if he comes to such a post with an empty skull it is then too late to fill it."

And Lord Wolseley in a lecture remarked : " So far as I know of the study of war, the great thing is to read a little and think à great deal—and think of it over and over again. Study is absolutely necessary for any man who ever wishes to command troops in the field."

To pursue the argument that the principles of war have remained unchanged, it will perhaps astonish those unfamiliar with military history beyond a vague conception of what is implied by the sacrifice of one million British soldiers in the Great War, that the losses sustained in earlier battles were comparatively as great. At St. Privat the Prussian Guard sustained a loss of 4,500 men out of 12,000, against French troops armed with the chassepot and muzzle-loading field-gun. In the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 General Todleben, the victor of Plevna, reports that the Russian losses from long-range rifle-fire amounted to 10,000 men, who had not even seen their enemy.

The loss of life during the American Civil War was half a million men. The graves of 300,000 Federals are known. At both Gettysburg and at the Wilderness, the two most important actions, the losses on both sides together amounted to 50,000 men, figures not far below those of any of the more important actions on the Western Front. The number is considerably larger than the death-rate of the British Army throughout the whole of the Peninsular Campaign ; and although the numbers engaged at Gravelotte in 1870 were larger by half than in either of these two battles of the Civil War, the loss of life in the latter was greater.

These were the casualties of battles in which the armament of the troops engaged were, as in the Great War, equal. But if we turn to an engagement wherein on one side there was a marked superiority, then the Battle of Omdurman in 1897 provides an excellent example of the havoc which can be wrought by bringing the immense superiority of fire power from superior weapons to the point of issue. The Dervishes, who numbered some 20,000 men, lost 8000 killed, while with the exception of the squadrons of the 21st Lancers, whose charge was surprised and trapped in a sunken Khor, none of the enemy approached within seven hundred yards of Lord Kitchener's attack.

These examples serve to demonstrate that not only is the death-rate in war constant, but that Stonewall Jackson's injunction to

his subordinates remained during the Great War the one vital principle to success in action. "Always mystify, mislead, and surprise the enemy." It would appear that both the general plan for battle, and the tactical operations which followed in the assaults on the Somme, at Arras, and at Passchendaele paid little heed to this well-tried, unfailing principle. Nor was there that elasticity of action and freedom of decision accorded to the Brigade Commanders which was the very foundation of the training of the German General Staff. Perhaps such strong control emanated from the fact that the hands of the Higher Command were tied by political considerations: and the influence spread to the commanders of the lesser formations.

Examples of success attending surprise tactics are to be found in the 2nd Worcestershires' raid from Clery in January 1917; the capture of the Hindenburg Line between Fontaine les Croisilles and Bullecourt by Baird's 100th Brigade in May 1917; and in Pinney's skilful crossing of the River Selle with the 33rd Division on the night of the 11th October, 1918. On the other hand, the disaster to the 100th Brigade in the Targelle Valley in October 1918 was due to a failure on the part of a higher command to permit the Brigade Commander on the spot to use his troops in his own manner over ground with the configuration of which he was familiar, and against an enemy whose dispositions he had reconnoitred.

Hamley, in his *Operations of War*, writes: "The commander's character has always weighed even more than his skill. Above all things he must have energy, perseverance, and determination. He must have courage, both moral and physical . . . knowledge of men, and how to excite their enthusiasm and to call forth their utmost endeavours; and a high sense of duty to the State." Judged from this standpoint, for example again, how utterly damned are Bazaine and Stoessel, the commanders respectively of French and Russians in the wars of 1870 and 1905; how exalted such leaders as the German Moltke and the Japanese Nogi and Oku. The French and Russian failures, wherein indifference found its Nemesis in a Bazaine and a Stoessel, lay not so much in strategic errors as in the indecisive action of commanders, lack of initiative of subordinates, and bad tactical handling of men.

"The first among all causes of victory," writes Von Clausewitz, "is to pursue a great object with energy and perseverance."

Analysed in the light of the teaching of Hamley and of Clausewitz to what supremacy rises the character of Marshal Foch.

How insignificant and trivial become the jealousies and intrigues of so many politicians and commanders who surrounded him.

If Napoleon had coined a phrase which summed up his tactical belief—" *Marcher aux canons* "—Marshal Foch zealously adhered to it. It was the holy fire of his faith. But at no time does it appear that he advocated the reckless or blind assault. On the contrary there is ample evidence that he opposed both rashness and ambition in the tactical scheme. In every situation his overwhelming anxiety was to be kept fully informed as to the position at the front, so that when opportunity came, true to his creed, he might command the counter-stroke, or throw in fresh reserves at the point where defence weakened. The practice of this tactical faith implied—Attack. Attack. Attack. *Marcher aux canons*—but never recklessly. The faith was applied without taking unnecessary risks.

The pupils of Moltke, the General Staff who conducted the offensives whether of 1866 and 1870 or of 1914 and 1918, governed each phase of the assault by that unity of command and of action so essential to success. That those of the Great War were not ultimately successful was due both to political and military accident even more than to the indomitable courage of British troops with their "backs to the wall." But in comparison with successive British offensives of no less magnitude than the German assault of March 1918, the Hindenburg-Ludendorff combination in this year was a notable victory for German arms, whether this be reckoned in terms of territory taken, numbers of prisoners and guns captured, of invalidated lines of communication, or of strategic points carried. No men more assiduously pursued Napoleon's maxim than did the German General Staff. The spray of infiltration-tactics, followed by great flowing waves of Infantry breaking upon sands whose firmness already was sapped by infiltration, finally drenched the defences which stood thereon. An almost perfect reproduction of these well-conducted offensives is to be found in a child's sand castle crumbling, then overwhelmed, before a resistless incoming tide.

Among German troops we discovered not only courage of a high order, in no way inferior to that of British soldiers, but that true summit of perfection, described by a veteran of Moore's Light Brigade as "the preservation of order in disorder, and of system in confusion." For while both at Mons in 1914, and in March and April 1918, both order and system were largely left to take care of themselves, the organization behind the

German lines, up to the hour of the Armistice, remained perfect, despite the disorder and confusion occasioned by the Allied hammer blows. Hideous as military necessity made it, the German retreat remains a masterpiece of rear-guard actions fought on a wide front, inflicting as the enemy did both heavy casualties and the utmost discomfort among the attacking forces.

The faith of Foch guided him always to the Moltke doctrine, itself founded upon the campaigns of Napoleon. As years recede, and with them personal rancour dies, and the petty spites and vanities in his character are forgotten, the name of Foch will be blazoned upon the pages of military history, less luminous than that of Napoleon, but in stature not much less. His was the will to win, the command which brought victory to the greatest army the world has ever known, in the world's greatest battles. Nor did Foch perish in the isolation of St. Helena.

There can be no hesitation in stating that the new leadership, implying unified direction and control on the Western Front, made a deep impress on the minds of the combatants. It should be said with equal emphasis that renewed confidence was due in no way to any excessive affection for our French Allies, either soldiers in the field, or civilians behind the line, or, again, for any lack of confidence on the part of the troops in Sir Douglas Haig's command. Due to their system of training both junior officers and soldiers regarded their Generals in the same light as does a schoolboy his teachers and preceptors. This was the rule, and, with notorious exceptions, it ran throughout the whole chain of command. So efficiently, and properly for the purpose, had the Press exalted Haig's personality that his character stood apart from the fashionable evasions or abuse of generalship.

The mistakes attributed to Haig, and for which he was responsible, were largely due to the uncertainty and contrariness of politics, sometimes at home and sometimes in France. There must be excepted, however, that of Passchendaele. There was no man in the British Armies the equal of Haig. His was the possession of experience in the widest field, supported by a successful record. Upon his qualities other soldiers and politicians, pre-eminently the nation, could rely. His faults were less apparent during the war-period than they are in retrospect. His taciturn nature was a weakness which may have been valuable to the reflective mind of a Chief-of-Staff, but was undesirable in a Commander-in-Chief.

The British Army had borne the brunt of the German 1918 offensive, and we were about to undertake the larger part in the

final offensive, culminating in victory. It was because of our belief in Haig's integrity, in his pattern as an Englishman, rather more than with any military genius with which we may have endowed him, that we had rallied to Haig's call, whether he had written it or not, earlier in the year : " There is no other course open to us but to fight it out ! Every position must be held to the last man : there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall, and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight on to the end." This message, whether penned in his own handwriting or not, and addressed " To all ranks of the British Forces in France," pinned British soldiers to their ground.

One may wonder if Haig, so cold and aloof, had any conception of his real power over the minds of men. The stature of his intellect cannot be compared with the astute and eager brilliance of Sir Henry Wilson. Yet Wilson, with the glaring defect of a genius for intrigue, could never have been the supreme Commander of British troops on the Western Front. Unity of command was a strategic necessity.

The appointment of Foch is a classic instance of " the man and the hour." Yet there can be no doubt that one man alone, Haig, dimly known, immensely realized, could have inspired fresh momentum in British troops so decimated as those which sprang to the assault in August 1918 ; and, when torn and riddled, rallied again on the Hindenburg Line, and when they stood beyond it, blood-stained and weary, flung themselves again and again, dealing smashing, paralysing blows, to the astonishment of Foch, and to the amazement of the War Cabinet.

At no moment, directly or by rumour, were the Warriors made aware of tension and friction between the Allied Commanders, the statesman and their intriguing subordinates. The salient, the outstanding, the only fact realized was that the Governments of the British Empire, France, and the United States had reposed their confidence in a man, Foch, chosen to unify the offensive on the Western Front and impel victory to the Allied arms. A great wave of relief, of content, and of thanksgiving swept over the Allied line from the coast of Flanders to the Swiss frontier.

As the first smashing attacks were made towards the middle of August, Amiens was disengaged ; and, as the battle of Bapaume expended itself, the flank of the German positions on the Somme was turned, compelling the enemy to withdraw to the East. Further Divisions in the new Battle of Arras broke the formidable Drocourt-Queant line and thrust the enemy back to the outer defences of the Hindenburg Line. At the same time the Germans

evacuated the Lys Salient, and we regained the ruins of Lens, Merville, Bailleul, and the command of Mont Kemmel. The territorial gains of the German armies in March and April had been wholly re-won with the capture of more than 12,000 prisoners, and some five-score guns. But no one saw the end, no one wanted the end. Confidence ran high. There was the Rhine, formidable, mysterious, and beyond—a long, long way to Berlin. Patience was there holding the Allied line in willing leash.

The seas were free as ever. Reliefs, reinforcements, supplies, and ammunition poured across the English Channel. In wait for them the U-boats lay hidden as a man waits for pigeons homing to the wood. Our flying boats, the famous "Spider Webb," and our destroyers were a match for them. The convoys came up to time, nothing disorganized, and very little lacking. And every day the numbers of American soldiers multiplied in France.

The unified command was justified. Foch became for British troops the chosen leader of the hour, the man whose will spelled victory.

Relieved before Ypres by the American Division whose war worthiness we had so sedulously fostered, we were transferred to Eperlecques to refit for the final act of the Great War drama. Happily, this scattered area with its peaceful homesteads, waving corn, bright August sunshine, and river bathing was the tonic essential more than any other kind of training and refitment to give renewed zeal to battle-trying troops. And as we lay in waiting we heard only of a victorious advance.

In the second week of September hundreds of buses, lorries, and camions appeared, and in these we embarked by night for the forward area. It was strange as dawn, the "zero hour" of previous attacks, laid bare the landscape, over which we rode without sound of shot or shell. We passed through Bapaume, a name only for a few jagged walls and heaps of rubbish. But from somewhere West the peasantry already dribbled back to rebuild a ruined home, to plough up the shell-torn land. Hard-bitten fatalists, this peasantry of Picardy.

We "debussed"—odd official term, issued without its inverted commas by a hierarchy so usually pedantic in its literature—and found ourselves amid the scenes of our most bitter fighting between the 2nd and 5th November, 1916. In this quiet I searched again for the graves of those of my command who had disappeared, lost in mud and smoke. The earth was now caked hard, and on this treeless waste no landmark remained which

might provide a guide to the position of our old lines. Only everywhere were great stores of material and salvage, including thousands of soda-water bottles, a regular issue to German troops in the line.

By sundown the transport had arrived and horses were picketed; and we had erected tentage, booths and bivouacs from the German material on the spot. My pioneers, for me, had raised a square canvas booth, resembling a bathing hut; and in this my batman with punctilious care prepared a bed and laid out pyjamas and a change of clothing. As I slipped between the blankets I experienced an extraordinary sense of gratification that at long last I could sleep peacefully on the ridge above Les Bœufs with Bapaume behind me.

But this was a night of awful terror. Indeed, in retrospect, I recollect no hours of fear, not those of High Wood or Passchendaele, not those of the Menin Road or when the Lys burst its dam and nearly drowned me, equal with what was encompassed on that night. It was indeed as if the spirit of Hell was let loose to be avenged and to exact reparation for so easy a conquest of Bapaume.

I was awakened suddenly by wild cries and by the sound of stampeding horses, plunging and struggling among the picket ropes. But above these sounds the noise of a tornado, screaming and whistling, backed by a great gush of hail and rain, defied even the thunder of gun-fire. The hut rocked hideously, and I was already soaked to the skin. Above me the roof in mockery waved and soared in the whirlwind. The door was flung violently almost from its hinges; and my batman, quick and precise, began to grope, covering my belongings against the deluge. With arms outstretched on either side I held tenaciously to the swaying walls, locking them around my person, while muscles and sinews were strained to breaking-point in holding the crazy affair upright.

I almost wept as I considered the predicament in which I should be found if I released my grasp upon those walls. The hut, like a box kite, would be blown to the valley of Les Bœufs and my clothes, blankets, valise, scattered over Picardy. And here, like Samson, I stood grasping the pillars of my temple while the devils of the audience howled with glee and hailed down wet abuse upon my person. I hung on grimly, fearful of the worst. And I could picture no greater evil that could befall me than to appear girt for the battle of the morrow clad in pink silk pyjamas and armed with a rusty revolver. We held together

this salubrious masterpiece of pioneers for long hours, relieving one another with outstretched arms to make the steel-girder-stretch between the walls which alone kept the fabric in its place. The thing trembled and shuddered, leaped in the air, bounced, bounded to one side, thrust and parried to evade our grasp. But we held it with even greater determination than we had ever held a beleaguered trench.

And then as suddenly as it had appeared this violent gale subsided, just as dawn broke gloriously, lemon and orange and gold, from over the German lines. While my batman hung out my things to dry, pink pyjamaed and booted I went out to discover my soldiery. The plateau resembled a placid harbour in which had been sunk a fishing fleet in full sail. Above the water, sodden canvas hung drearily from timbers, and the men were huddled like wrecked mariners, drenched to the skin, waiting for rescue. So fierce was the tempest that empty wagons had been overturned, and saddlery bundled for hundreds of yards from the transport lines. Animals had disappeared. But I found my transport drivers rounding them up amid the ruins of Rocquigny, and where they chewed the tree stumps of St. Pierre Vaast Wood. Although the fields were webbed with barbed wire they had not suffered much ill except abrasions.

Discomfited and weary from the night we marched through Equancourt and Fins to Heudecourt, a village which still bore some semblance to its structural self. Two miles to the east lay the Hindenburg Line, and everywhere, beyond shell-fire, gangs of German prisoners were engaged upon road making.

Although enormous strides had been made to rebuild the railway it was still many miles behind, and completed work was frequently destroyed by delayed-action mines, still further hampering progress. The roads, too, had suffered considerably, both from shell-fire and neglect; and with the enormous lorry traffic upon them, were, in most cases, nothing but broken tracks with a rough stone surface. Villages and farm buildings, as such, had ceased to exist, every structure having been either destroyed by shell-fire, or deliberately blown up and gutted by the retreating enemy. Similarly, also, the bridges over the Canal du Nord and the small streams had to be rebuilt in response to the increasing and heavy traffic demand upon them. The progress of horse transport and Infantry was confined solely to tracks across the country. After having passed over the desolation of the 1916 battlefields, except for the complete destruction of the villages, the countryside had not been seriously disturbed.

In certain localities, where heavy fighting had occurred during the German offensive of March 1918, the ground was much broken by shell-holes, but otherwise was easily passable. Considering the obstacles which it had to overcome it seems almost incredible that the British advance could have been made so rapidly ; and that it continued after the conquest of the Hindenburg Line in October, even more rapidly.

The 33rd Division took over the front from the 21st Division between the series of trenches which had been the old front line at the end of the Cambrai Reverse. This included Poplar Trench and Beech Walk, lying west of Villers Guislain and just east of Epéhy.

It was apparent from the outset that the task of the 33rd Division would be peculiarly difficult. As had always been its misfortune, the Division was thrown into battle, not when there was a chance of surprise, or when a carefully prepared artillery barrage of great strength could support it, but when the advance was held up, or had been held up, by a system of defended works of unusual strength. This may be compared to the tasks assigned to the Division at High Wood and Les Bœufs in 1916 ; at Fontaine les Croisilles in the Hindenburg Line, and at Polygon Wood in the Menin Road battle of 1917.

An assault was ordered upon the outer defences of the Hindenburg Line, including the network of trenches and posts commanding the approaches to the Canal de St. Quentin.

For some unknown reason the artillery support was very weak, neither were tanks available. Villers Guislain itself was exceptionally strong, being defended by machine-guns at every point, and by concrete pill-boxes.

The nature of the fighting resembled the attacks on the Somme and at Croisilles. The Germans, the same Alpine Corps¹ whom we had met at Meteren, strongly entrenched in their fortress of the Hindenburg Line put up the stoutest resistance. Having regard to the success attending the opening of the offensive, and that the World War was to terminate within six weeks in an Armistice of humiliating defeat, there may be cause for wonder that in the story of the last weeks of fighting there is the record, also, of the stoutest resistance and the most grim hand-to-hand combat. This bears a simple explanation.

The German armies were as yet in no way defeated. The retreat to the Hindenburg Line, under pressure, was an orderly retirement from territory without a blade of cover, carried out in

¹ *Das Königlich Bayerische Infanterie-Leibregiment*, edited by officers of the Regiment.

a series of rear-guard actions, well fought, while the communications, ammunition dumps, and dugouts behind were systematically destroyed, mined, or set with booby traps. The retirement was carried out without disorder; and freed from holding salients, with a shorter line, Ludendorff was able to concentrate his troops in the hitherto impregnable Hindenburg Line, while he prepared for a further retirement to the line of the River Scheldt, itself a natural barrier running for many miles across the Western Front. To pierce the Hindenburg Line was as formidable a task as it ever had been. It cannot be denied that the success which finally attended our arms was in no small measure an expression of faith in the leadership of the will to win.

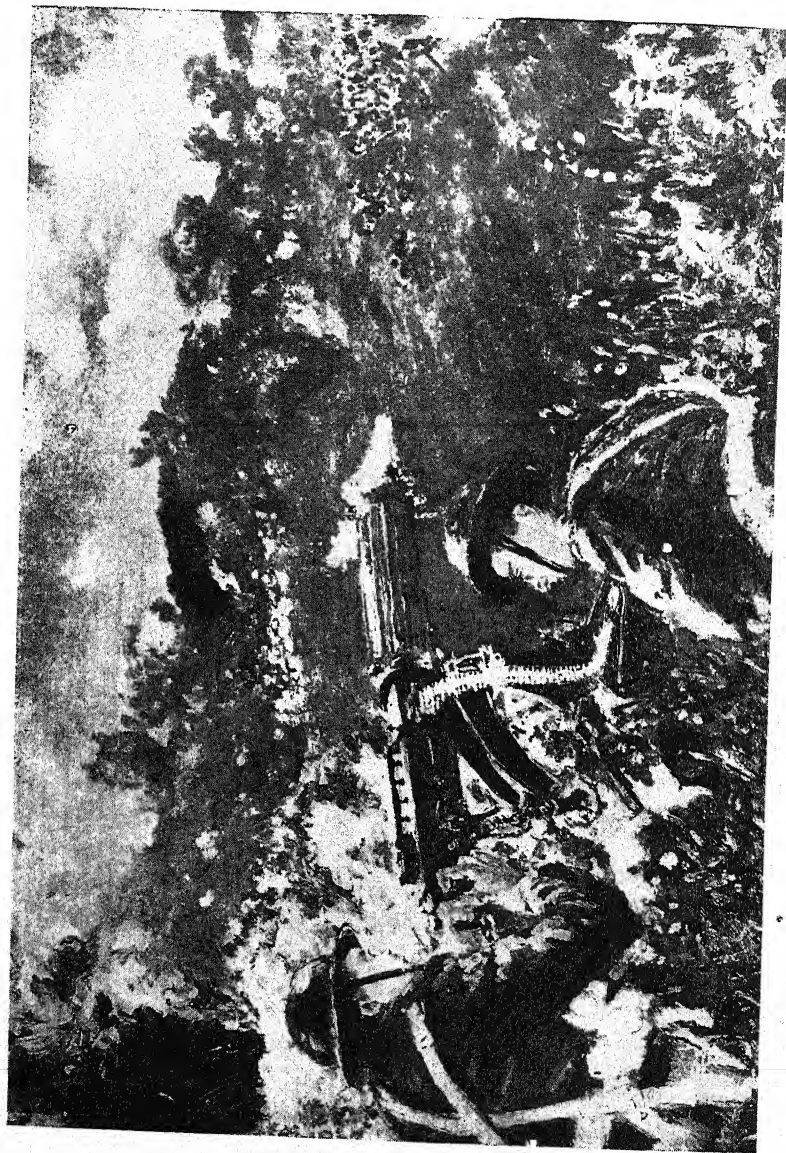
We came in then, not when the going was good, but when the advance had been held up by a system of defended work of unusual strength, at the pivot of which were the walls and cellars of Villers Guislain, bristling with machine-guns in concrete emplacements.

On the 21st September we attacked the tenacious Alpine Corps. Attack and counter-attack followed one another, the Scottish Battalions and King's Liverpools being engaged. The crux of the position was Meath Post and the sunken Gloucester Road. From my point of observation I could view the narrow ravine formed by the cutting, filled at one moment by British troops, at the next by German field-greys. A hail of German stick bombs, thrown as many by ourselves as by the enemy, filled the air above the road and Meath Post. The passage through the outskirts of the village was one of extraordinary danger, owing not only to missiles and explosives, but also to flying bricks and masonry. At a moment when it appeared that we had attained a mastery of Gloucester Road I rushed a half company of machine-gunners to hold it against further attack. I found the road choked with dead, the Germans displaying bayonet wounds, and our men mostly shot through the head by sharpshooters. No sooner had I withdrawn after placing my guns than the enemy, contemptuous of losses, again stormed the road, killing the gunners at their posts. During the following night the Scottish Rifles recaptured the road and carried Meath Post at the point of the bayonet. We fought without cessation for five days, suffering heavy casualties both in the actual assault and from gas and shell-fire.

Owing to the rapidity of the advance up to this point, and the mining of roads, bridges, and railways, it had not been possible



GERMAN SOLDIERS DURING BRITISH PRELIMINARY BOMBARDMENT
SHELTERING IN A DUGOUT



ACTION—BEYOND THE HINDENBURG LINE
From a painting by the Author.

to move forward the Casualty Clearing Stations. In consequence the Medical Service was taxed almost to breaking-point. This was a new experience both for our wounded and for the Medical Service, who had been accustomed to the complete organization of its Casualty Clearing Stations, and main Dressing Stations, within a few thousand yards of the battle. The work, however, in this sector of the Canadian Corps Casualty Clearing Station, particularly of its nurses, who worked at fever heat, dealing with hundreds of fresh cases daily, with practically no shelter against either shell, bomb, or weather, was beyond all praise.

The enemy had experimented in April with the inclusion of gas in a bombardment of high-explosive shells. All his bombardments at this period were of this nature. The pitiful sight of men struggling back to the Aid Posts with limbs burned and lungs gripped as in a vice, faces green-coloured, retching and in ghastly agony, can never be forgotten by those who witnessed it. The Signallers, in particular, were, from the very nature of their work, the easiest victims of gas poisoning and suffered heavily, but never was the Signal Service, considering the enormous difficulties of distance and destruction to be overcome, more efficient. The Gunners, who had little or no cover, but were lying in the open with guns of all calibres in echelon, suffered very severe casualties, both among men and animals, especially from the effects of "Mustard" gas.

The enemy had put up the most formidable resistance; very few prisoners had been taken: both sides, in the bitterest fighting, had incurred heavy losses. The German position at Villers Guislain was slowly being outflanked from the North, while the 12th Division upon our right had succeeded in establishing themselves on the high ground overlooking the enemy's positions on the Canal de St. Quentin at Honnecourt.

An attack on a very wide front was ordered for the 29th September. It was intended that the German position between Villers Guislain and Venduille should be outflanked on both flanks by the pressure of the Armies on the left and right of the Third Army. The advance of the 33rd Division would consist either of a peaceful penetration into ground vacated by the enemy, or would effect the capture of a large number of Germans whose line of retreat would be cut off by the St. Quentin Canal in their rear. On the day of the great attack, except for violent bursts of fire, no action was taken by the 33rd Division. On the evening of this day it was reported that the attack upon the passage of the canal at Venduille, and that the advance of the

American Divisions and of the Fourth Army astride the Hindenburg Line, had not been carried out according to plan. In the North the attack was more successful, but although Cambrai itself was captured, our losses had been far heavier than had been anticipated ; and it was, therefore, necessary to reorganize the forces disposed for the attack. It was apparent also that the enemy opposed to the 33rd Division had not vacated their position, and that a large number of machine-guns still commanded the approaches, the Targelle Ravine and Pigeon Valley, to the St. Quentin Canal.

While conducting a reconnaissance on horseback between Villers Guislain and Vaucelette Farm I came suddenly under machine-gun fire. I swung my horse, and a bullet piercing my neck beneath the chin came out through the mouth, carrying away some teeth in the lower jaw. At the same moment a shell, probably fired from a sniping battery over direct sights, pitched at the foot of my mount, throwing us both violently to the ground. I was drenched with blood from the horse, while no doubt the injury to my mouth provided all the appearance of death. I could not extricate my body from the weight of the horse which bore on it, and my left leg was pinned. So severe was the pain that I lost consciousness. I did not recover until I found myself on a stretcher laid under a blanket outside an Aid Post. To the considerable astonishment of those awaiting medical attention I displayed the ordinary signs of aggravation and an annoyance expected by most private soldiers of their colonels. I had recovered my senses, and was borne to the Casualty Clearing Station. The orderlies cleared up some of the mess, but I had to wait my turn for a vacant bed. Wounded were being cleared as fast as surgeons in their shirt-sleeves could accomplish their work. But speedy as were the butchers, death was faster still and left ample space for incomers.

British and Germans were treated alike ; and beside me lay a young Bavarian, his chin still hairless, one of the Alpine Corps, from mountains I knew and loved, with a shattered thigh and other grievous injuries. His face was pale, and the eyes very bright. Orderlies and nurses looked at him every now and again to see how he fared. And while others groaned, and some shrieked with agony, he never uttered a sound. Only when night fell and the lamps were lighted did he begin to whimper quietly. His hand lay stretched out hanging over the coverlet. I sometimes glanced at the lad. He was crying like a child, so I touched his hand, and he held on. I think that made his passage easier,

for he sighed and smiled at me and a little later he slept. Then they took the body away.

The surgeons could find no broken bone in my leg, and patched up my neck with bandages, wound round the head and chin. I was told I might hop along to "Blighty." But I turned eastwards, and came back to my transport lines beneath an embankment by Heudecourt. My leg remained an agony, but I was determined, after four years of battle, not to be deprived of a right to participate in victory. So wooden crutches were cut by my Battalion Pioneers, and after some practice I could make good headway over ground, while viewing its topography and ordering the disposition of the guns.

Such good progress had been made to the Divisional flanks that the Higher Command anticipated that the enemy would have vacated the position upon our immediate front, and that we should be able to take further objectives without fighting. But our vigilant patrols denied such a suggestion. Vigorous protest was made to the Corps Commander against the frontal attack for which orders were received.

We who had viewed the ground, and had ascertained the strong position of the German machine-guns enfilading the valleys which ran vertically towards our front, urged that we should be permitted to deploy under cover of darkness to the south, and then, by leaping from one tactical point to another, to outflank the enemy position. The scheme was one demonstrating a fine sense in use of ground and of the unusual. An astonishing obstinacy rebuked such leadership; and three strong Battalions were hurled one after another down the ravines to be destroyed platoon by platoon by German machine-gun teams. The Glasgow Highlanders and the 2nd Worcestershires were almost wiped out, regular lines of dead soldiers, headed by their officers, testifying the whole way down the valley to the valour of the troops and of the courage of the assault. In Villers Guislain itself, still tenaciously held by the Germans, the Liverpools, 1st Middlesex, and 93rd Highlanders moved forward, literally step by step, hopping from one hole to another, crawling through the bricks, fighting for every fresh wall and stronghold in most bitter hand-to-hand combat. It was in this village that lay my own special task, for concentrated machine-gun fire alone could hold that of the German gunners in their concrete emplacements. I was severely handicapped with one good leg and a couple of props supporting the shoulders, hopping crazily about the streets and among the scarecrow houses. I must have been a

conspicuous target, but perhaps the spirit of their compatriot of the C.C.S. whom I had helped to Heaven deflected the snipers' aim. By the close of day, having suffered heavy losses, we had driven the enemy back and had won the heights overlooking the St. Quentin Canal. Beyond it lay leafy woods, villages, houses with roofs, church spires, yellowing corn, the vision of the breakthrough and of Berlin.

Indestructible cohesion, best of all qualities which an armed body can possess, had carried the Armies to the conquest of the Hindenburg Line. The triumph of Foch and of the unified command.

CHAPTER XVI

WARRIOR VICTORIOUS

NOVEMBER 1918

Beyond the Hindenburg Line—To hospital—Marlborough's example—
Malplaquet and Maubeuge—Liberating French villages—Retro-
spect—Passage of the Forest of Mormal—Crossing the River
Sambre—Bridging—German rear-guard actions—Armistice—On
the highest peak of human history.

. . . There's no need of pledge or oath
To bind our lovely friendship fast,
By firmer stuff
Close bound enough.

By wire and wood and stake we're bound,
By Fricourt and by Festubert,
By whipping rain, by the sun's glare,
By all the misery and loud sound,
By a Spring day,
By Picard clay.

Show me the two so closely bound
As we, by the wet bond of blood,
By friendship blossoming from mud,
By Death : we faced him, and we found
Beauty in Death,
In dead men, breath.¹

SO soon as we were established, another Division passed through our lines to follow the retreat. There were pockets of the enemy to be found ; and swift as was the advance, much caution was exercised. Four days later, pushing on to Malincourt through Villers Outreaux, before the sun rose I established my flag in Clary village before the advanced patrols party had arrived.

Not since the day on which I had marched across the broken German trenches at Fricourt had I experienced the sense, tingling and triumphant, of victory. Now no leash would hold us. It

¹ From "Two Fusiliers," by Robert Graves.

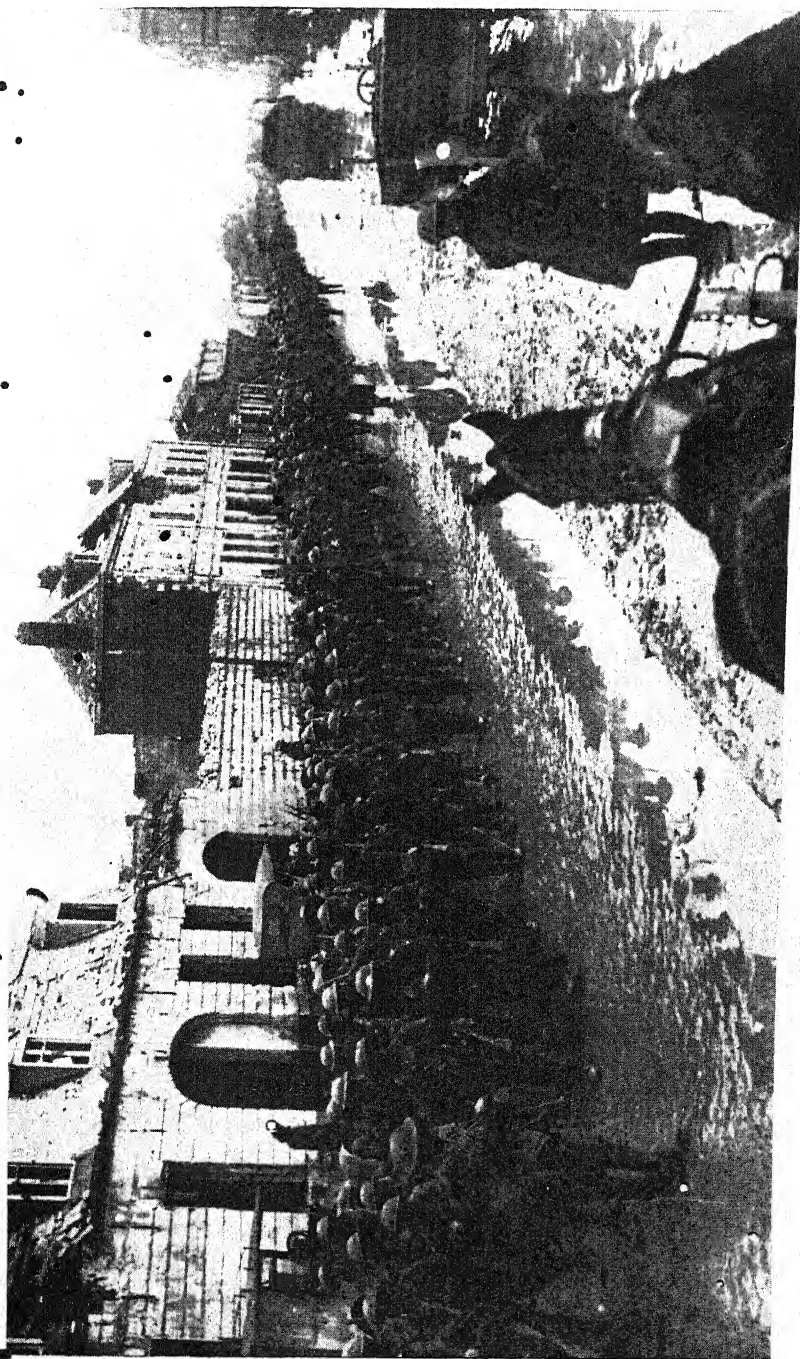
would require an obstacle more formidable than the Hindenburg Line to impede our progress. The inhabitants, by some marvellous miracle, produced French flags, and waving these played the "Marseillaise" on a gramophone as my soldiers marched in, accompanied by the 5th Scottish Rifles.

At this distance of time few readers of these passages can hope to understand with what feelings of emotion inhabitants greeted the armed victors, their allies in khaki. During four years they had seen hundreds of British prisoners, but now at last, let the Mayor proclaim it. "Thanks to their rapid and vigorous pursuit, the brave Scottish troops have succeeded in preventing the enemy from finishing the work of destruction he had commenced in our Commune." But almost as he wrote this letter to the Divisional General, the Germans shelled the village with gas, knowing full well that its inhabitants were only old men, women, and children, with no means to protect themselves against gas poison. King George V visited Clary shortly after the Armistice, while the 5th Scottish Rifles provided the Guard of Honour, and the Square was renamed the "Place des Écossais."

The peaceful entry of Clary was no satisfaction. Angered by the shelling, the Scottish Rifles debouched from the village, outflanking the German battery, and before all could escape, captured two field-guns with their crews at the point of the bayonet. During that day we advanced to Bertry and in all sixteen miles, halting at night in the village of Troisvilles.

Here chagrin overwhelmed me. Pain in the knee threatened to overwhelm my consciousness, while the wound in my throat, uncared for and unhealed, festered and swelled the glands. I was persuaded to retire; and agreed, provided that the command of my Battalion should remain unfilled. An ambulance, travelling back across country almost sixty miles, landed me at the first rail-head. Here, a feeble figure indeed, I was placed in the berth of a hospital train and received first medical care. And so to Hardelot, the pleasant bathing-place, set among pines overlooking the English Channel. Twelve hours only from Troisvilles to a bed in No. 6 (Lady Murray's) Red Cross Hospital.

Only the fretting of my mind against this imprisonment in the hour of victory prevented my giving myself up to the quiet peace and luxury of this well-ordered hospital. It seemed as though the surgeons and nurses conspired to mend me quickly, lest I be cheated of the prize. An Italian, with fingers of velvet and sinews of steel massaged the swollen knee-joint to a quick semblance of its other self; while antiseptics and good food



THE FINAL ADVANCE. BRITISH SOLDIERS ON THE MARCH

✱



LEIBER WITH HAND GRENADE

*From a drawing in Das Königlich Bayerische Infanterie—Leibregiment
im Weltkrieg.*

restored the cavity below my chin. Each day brought a telegram from the Front, the familiar D.R.L.S. of ubiquity. Farther east they went, more speedy was the advance, while far too slowly my injuries healed.

At last, and with what bitterness, I learned that once more to replace me as a casualty, another commander had been sent to inherit my kingdom. If there I could not reign, at least one inured in its traditions, animated by its idealisms, should have passed to him the standard of the C.O.

A desperate fear clutched at my heart. With what pain I paraded before the examining surgeon, demonstrating that rather than being fit for "Blighty," I was fit for command. I implored and protested. But those at the Base, like the Cabinet at home, could not believe that victory so soon was possible. They did not know the new spirit of the troops. They had not felt the impetus of the assault. They pleaded for time. I, desperate, stormed impatiently. And then, confronted with the stone wall of obstruction and complacency, I telegraphed to a young friend, a boy pilot in the R.A.F., to visit me in hospital in one of the squadron cars. He came. While others lunched, we went. I would have liked to have said "au revoir" to the nurses, but would take no chances. Back by car I went to Troisvilles; and over the Selle, crossed so brilliantly by the Division a few days before, I found the Battalion in action before the village of Englefontaine, with prisoners streaming back along the roads.

How thrilling it was to read :

"To G.O.C., 33rd Division.

"The Mairie of Englefontaine, which met this afternoon in a cellar of this village, begs to express to you in name of the 1200 inhabitants freed by the British Army its deepest feelings of hearty gratitude.

"From O.C., French Mission, 33rd Division."

The Allied Drive is incomparable in all the annals of military history. No Huns of Attila charged more eagerly to the attack. No Paladins of Charlemagne more proudly carried the course of victory on their pennants. The troops of Marlborough at Malplaquet never harried the enemy more fiercely. Those of Napoleon at Austerlitz never more gloriously swept the enemy from the field; nor when the French armies, conquering the Alpine peaks, charged down upon the bounteous plains of Piedmont were they more zealous in their quest for conquest. Not those of Wellington at Waterloo. Not Jackson at Gettysburg,

nor Von Moltke at Gravelotte. Not when the Prussian overthrew the Third Napoleon and destroyed his armies before Paris. Not the armies of Kitchener who sent the Khalifa's hordes flying from the battlefield of Omdurman. Nor yet the soldiers of Oku when the Russians fled from Port Arthur. No Warriors in all history so applied themselves to the business of victory.

And on the German side, while Hindenburg and Ludendorff, the Kaiser and his statesmen put their heads together seeking for a formula which might save their Armies and the German nation from defeat and ruin, no Warriors in all history, be it said, in the hour of their defeat, fought with greater courage and skill than the German Armies thrown from the impregnable defences of the Hindenburg Line.

In the drive of Marshal Foch east of the Hindenburg Line there is something of the quality of that of the Duke of Marlborough, who, in 1709, had carried victory over these very fields. Of Marlborough, Bolingbroke had written: "He, a new, a private man, acquired by merit and management a more decided influence than high birth, confirmed authority, and even the crown of Great Britain, had given to King William." Marlborough remains unique as an Army Commander in that his victories began at an age when the work of most men is done. He had held no command until at the age of fifty-two he took the field in Flanders.

Marlborough, memorable in history for his great victories of Blenheim, Ramillies, Oudenarde, and Malplaquet, as a captain stands alone with an unbroken record of victory. Voltaire has noted that he never fought a battle which he did not win, nor ever besieged a fortress which he did not take. In the history of Marlborough's career, too, there are to be found some facts for useful comparison with the conduct of the Allied campaign. Marlborough's difficulties proceeded not so much from the enemy as from the ignorance and timidity of his own Allies. Though he was never defeated in the field, victory after victory was snatched from his grasp by the incapacity of his officers and the stubbornness of his Dutch Allies. Though Marlborough coined no phrase which has been handed down to posterity as a military precept, his faith, like that of Napoleon, was "*Marcher aux canons.*" The vigour and audacity of his plans astonished the cautious strategists of his day. At the opening of the eighteenth century a hundred victories since Rocroi had taught the world to regard the French Army as invincible. Blenheim, one of the most memorable battles in world history, changed all

that ; and " Malbrook " became a name for fear for every child of France.

With what confidence Foch, successor to those who had commanded Britain's ancient enemy, when he gave the orders for the Great Offensive of August 1918, might have echoed Marlborough's words before the Battle of Blenheim. The Duke, commanding a strange medley of Englishmen, Dutchmen, Hanoverians, Danes, Würtembergers, and Austrians, representatives of almost all the Teutonic races, wrote on the eve of battle : " I have great reason to hope that everything will go well, for I have the pleasure to find all the officers willing to obey without knowing any other reason than that it is my desire, which is very different from what it was in Flanders, where I was obliged to have the consent of a council of war for everything I undertook." Marshal Foch commanded perhaps even a stranger force, the British with Australians, Canadians, South Africans, and New Zealanders ; the French, the polyglot Americans, Portuguese, negroes from Northern Africa, Indians from Hindustan, Chinese coolies ; half the races of the world. He, too, found all officers willing to obey because it was his desire. The student may well compare the history of Marlborough's epoch with that of the Allies. The War Cabinets, the Supreme War Council in Paris, the friction between the Army Commanders and between politicians and the directors of military operations, had their counterpart more than two centuries earlier. When the supreme command was vested in Marlborough, victory proceeded. The leadership of Foch was a no less triumph.

On the very battlefield where Marlborough finally forced the French to submission, the British, bearing the brunt of the Allied Offensive, fought the last battle of the Great War. On the edge of the Forêt de Mormal stands Malplaquet. There is a similarity in those last battles of late October and November 1918 which redounds to the military glory of Germany as it did to the French in 1709. France was exhausted, as was Germany. The terrible slaughter which bears the name of the Battle of Malplaquet testifies to the fighting quality in the French soldiers. Though starving, they fell back in serried masses, which the efforts of Marlborough could not break. Though the French lost 12,000 men, the forcing of their lines of entrenchment had cost the Allies double that number. In 1918 history precisely repeated itself upon the same battlefield. Germany, almost starving ; soldiers fell back with yet unbroken ranks. The Allied losses

exceeded those of Germany between the end of July and the Armistice by approximately 150,000 men, not doubled as in earlier battles, but a figure greatly in excess of the defence.

It is interesting and noteworthy that in the Reichswehr, the Army of Germany since the Treaty of Versailles, there remains a custom, linking the young force with an enemy who fought the British Armies with such courage, and so very nearly defeated them. Each Company of each Battalion in the Reichswehr represents a regiment of the old Army, and maintains its traditions, a factor of high moral value when looking to a future whose horizon is shrouded with the clouds of war.

Way back behind the Allied Drive, for fifty miles lay a country almost bereft of communication. Though tens of thousands of motor vehicles, gutting and ploughing the roads and lanes, by day and night, hour after hour, brought up fresh provisions and the material of war, carrying back the wounded, the troops daily felt the strain of such tremendous physical exertions with tightened belts. Nothing remained in the conquered villages. For them, with the German retreat, bread had ceased.

A duty, imposed by humanitarian considerations, if not by customs of war, fell immediately to those who relieved the French and Flemish hamlets and homesteads. The people must be fed. And often men on short rations, physically exhausted after miles of marching, manoeuvre, and of battle, forwent their supper at the close of day that French children might rejoice that victory had brought them the peace of mind which infants can only realize through a stomach filled.

The village of Englefontaine had been stoutly held by the Boche. Its relief had cost us many killed and wounded, and the village had suffered severely from the bombardment and in the hand-to-hand fighting. Almost as we rushed the streets, driving the enemy into the woods beyond, the inhabitants came forth from their cellars. Miraculously again appeared the French flags. Englefontaine had been devastated in a manner which demonstrated an ugly bitterness on the part of defeated troops. Everywhere was the wilful and needless destruction of the property of those who had shown much kindness, even hospitality upon an enemy billeted in their houses, imposing harsh disciplines. The relief of the inhabitant was very real, and their anger against the Germans most bitter. Some urged us to the pursuit, showing the exits from the village, and where pockets of the enemy still waylaid our advance in the dense undergrowth.

East of the village rose a dense forest, the Forêt de Mormal,

thickly planted, extending from west to east for over seven miles. I threw out a fan of machine-guns, mounted in upper stories of the houses, on the eastern outskirts of the village. From these vantage points we hosed the undergrowth with a hail of bullets, searching the forest edge up to two thousand yards in depth, and along a front of two miles.

When we carried forward the assault on the following day we discovered the undergrowth and ditches choked with German dead, their faces to the east. These were they who had pillaged the village of Englefontaine.

I was talking with my Regimental Sergeant-Major when a motor-cyclist brought Dispatches to my headquarters in a farmhouse, ordering the capture of the forest, the passage of the River Sambre, and the assault against Maubeuge.

It was with my Sergeant-Major that I had fired the first Vickers gun on the Western Front from over the sandbags opposite to Bois Grenier, in early December 1914; and we were very near to Le Câteau, where the 93rd had first met the German Army in that disaster of which I had heard on the decks of the *Edinburgh Castle*.

I had remarked to my Sergeant-Major how curious it was that in casting the mind's eye back across the memories of war, the incidents which seemed to stand out most clearly were those connected with the weather. Grey evening clouds hovering like vultures ready to swoop down with outspread wings to devour the landscape, and then that devastating body-tearing barrage. The brilliantly light and warm sunny morning, and then the field of carnage. A night upon which the flying clouds brushed past the cold rays of the moon, sometimes lifting their train to allow a shaft of silver to steal down upon mortal man, stalking on a raiding party in a watery waste of shell-holes. And then, over the top, somehow through the wire, down into the Boche trench, a bayonet stab here, the flash of a pistol, then another and another. People shouting, machine-guns going like hell anywhere and everywhere, rockets soaring up into the air. Chunks of mud and tufts of earth flying round your ears. Grab somebody by the arm, he's whimpering, he'll do. Pull him out of the trench behind you, run like the devil, back through the wire, topple over into your own trench, badly winded. Shrapnel bursting all round. Your skin's whole; drag the prisoner down into your dugout. Have a look at him, only a kid, unwashed, unshaved, frightened out of his life, knows nothing. Have a look at his *Röhrbuch*. Prussian Guards! My God! Give him a tot of rum

and a Woodbine. Half your men don't get back, and all you've got for your trouble is a human spud !

My Sergeant-Major was telling me the story of Le Câteau.

We're sitting in the cornfields, lazily leaning against the little stocks, whose long purple shadows lie stretched upon the ground, sleeping or smoking ; a snatch of melody from several voices floats through the still evening air ; equipment and rifles are lying here and there. Against the homestead farm a group of officers sit chatting and studying a map. It's a peaceful scene. A loud crack, a sheet of flame, a column of smoke, and a cloud of brick-dust. It is the trumpet-call of war ! The eastern end of the farm-house is rent by a huge hole. The air is filled with sound—the boom of guns, the clanking of equipment, sharp orders, and hurrying feet across the stubble. The skyline of the meadow and orchard in the offing is crowned with little figures in grey, darting hither and thither. A rattle of musketry ; some sleepers will sleep on for ever. The Battalion retires. From a window high up in the farm-house a machine-gun spits out its withering fire upon the hordes rushing through the orchard.

A thunder-clap ! a cloud of pink dust. The window has disappeared, but from its ruins emerges a little man, coated white as a miller and bearing on his shoulders a Maxim gun and tripod. He is pursued, dragging his way across the stubble field. The enemy is upon him ; but as he reaches the little pond beside the church he hurls his precious burden into it, and thus defeats his enemy.

Four years afterwards this same little man, my Sergeant-Major, aged as a yew tree and tenacious as its roots, stood up and gazed through the gateway of the courtyard, across the fields to where Le Câteau's spires were etched against the sky. For this day he had not waited in vain ; and except that we had changed our rôle with that of the enemy, we now the pursuit, they the retreat, the action was identical.

We were thrusting the enemy to his final line.

For the passage of the wood one road only was available for transport, and this at many points had been already destroyed by mines and rendered impassable. It was impossible for the Infantry to pass through the density of the wood owing to the heavy undergrowth ; whilst the clearings in the centre of the forest afforded excellent barriers of defence for the enemy. The bridges over the Sambre River, with the exception of one, had also been blown up by the enemy. In order to avoid the probable heavy gas bombardment of the forest, it was decided at the

outset, that the whole of the Machine-Gun Battalion with its transport should follow immediately in the wake of the leading Infantry Battalion of the leading Brigade ; and, in this position, should advance at least as far as the eastern edge of the Forêt de Mormal. This bold plan of advance might have been regarded as foolhardy, but as will be seen, it proved to have been most wisely adopted.

In our passage through the forest, I elected to drive my transport ahead of the Battalion, on the tactical grounds that, if attacked, the gunners could come to the transport and thus get into action, whereas with only a single road, if the transport followed, it would be difficult to get the machine-guns into action. My decision was quite cold-blooded. If what I considered possible did in fact happen, the animals might be slaughtered in their traces. But the guns would be in action.

On the 3rd November we assaulted. The Middlesex did great work with the bayonet. In Hecq and on the edge of the forest there were rows and rows of enemy dead piled behind fallen tree-trunks, bayoneted. In the road itself there were enormous craters which had been blown and immense obstacles formed by felled trees across the road. I sent forward my spare horses with traces and cleared the road ahead. Then we came to the village of Locquignol. My band with its instruments was marching in the rear of the Battalion.

As we entered the main street of the village it was deserted. But the band struck up "La Marseillaise." Heads appeared at the windows, at first timidly and shyly, then old men, women, and children ran out into the streets. They were surely awaiting our advance, for a woman ran out with a garland of flowers and placed it round my neck. I felt rather foolish, for they cheered and wept and kissed my old trench boots as I rode down the main street.

Then we passed on, still through the forest, until we came to the line of the River Sambre. The Germans were entrenched upon the high ground on the eastern bank, after destroying the remaining bridge.

The Infantry had advanced as fast as men could march. The machine-guns, lightly equipped, and holding to the traces and mounted on limbers, went forward at the pace of the mules' tripple. When the Infantry outpost line was checked and held on the river bank, the machine-guns came into action immediately.

With a system of organization with machine-guns attached to each Infantry Battalion, it is doubtful whether the pursuit could

have been carried out so rapidly, enabling fire-power to be concentrated at the decisive point securing the passage of the river and the further Infantry advance. The tactical disposal of machine-guns in the Unit of the Machine-Gun Battalion enabled a concentrated volume of fire to be brought to bear upon the enemy's resistance, preceding the Infantry assault. Bridges had to be constructed under fire from forest material, and from the doors and timbers of houses. The unified control of a Division's machine-guns permitted every gun available to be brought to bear, while the Infantry waited under cover in reserve without casualty, until the engineers, protected by this fire, had thrown the bridges across the river. Here was a battle involving manœuvre and mobility. The control of machine-guns in the Battalion organization of the Machine-Gun Corps, without interference with the Brigade units, without loss of time, produced overwhelming fire-power at the decisive point, facilitating the immediate advance.

The value of the Machine-Gun Corps Battalion organization in attack, as it had been in defence at Meteren, was superior to any alternative form of organization hitherto conceived.

Sustained machine-gun fire enabled the Infantry to select a suitable place for bridge building, to dump requisite material at the proposed bridge-head, and under cover of dusk to throw the first bridge across an unfordable river and establish communication with the other side.

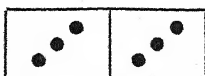
On the following day, the 6th of November, at 8 a.m., encouraged by the successful operations in crossing the river, and supported by an Artillery Brigade which had followed hard in our wake, we began to move forward. But the enemy was determined, and slipping into the flank, temporarily unguarded while the machine-guns were being carried to the eastern bank, destroyed the bridge. It was at this hour, when the 2nd Worcestershires were beleaguered, that the Signallers of the 1st Queen's swam the river and carried over ammunition stacked on rafts. I myself took six limbers, which were driven to another point on the river less exposed to fire. These were thrown into the river-bed, and dragged into position by men of my Battalion, swimming, and standing on the sunken vehicles. Waist-high, aided by drag-ropes stretched as a handrail across the water, men were then able to ford the river, walking along the sunken limbers. The river forded, the attack shook itself out again into line.

With my Adjutant, as at Meteren, I rode ahead of the Division,

making a reconnaissance, when on the last day of battle we came again suddenly under heavy machine-gun fire. There were no friendly furrows in which to hide and wriggle, so we rode like blazes, with heads bowed over our horses' necks, and brought a half-company into action.

As the Divisional Headquarters passed through Sart Bara in the Forêt de Mormal, the Mayor presented an address to the Divisional Commander which was subsequently circulated to all Units. Its language well displays the emotion of the people released from the yoke of the German invasion. Of this I give a literal translation :

"Commandant la



Division.

"GENERAL,

"Permit a population tried by the most odious yoke which history has known to come and lay at your feet the expression of its most sincere regard and its most absolute devotion. During more than four years we have groaned beneath the Teuton boot, we have known every humiliation, every injustice, every violence.

"We have witnessed the elevation to the height of a national institution theft, espionage, courtesanerie, and our hearts and our souls have been folded like flowers too delicate before an icy wind.

"But a day has been born, General, upon which thanks to your military Science, thanks to the incomparable valour of the British Army, our miseries have vanished as sunrise banishes the phantoms of the night.

"General, we offer you the most profound thanks which our hearts are capable of feeling.

"Live for ever, General. Live for ever the magnificent and valiant British Army !

"May God give long life to the King, to his gracious Queen, and prosperity to all the English people."

On the 9th of November, while we lay between Berlaimont and Aulnoye, it was strongly rumoured that the Germans had sent plenipotentiaries to Marshal Foch, asking an Armistice. By 12 noon on this day official confirmation was received, but it was learned that Marshal Foch had only agreed to an Armistice under the most severe conditions to the enemy, which he must accept or continue the fighting by 12 noon on the 11th.

In fact, we ourselves were glad of respite. The speed of the advance had far outrun even the energies of the Transport Services. Rail-heads were many miles behind. We were on short rations, now shared also with multiplying civilian populations, while ammunition, also, was running short. It would have been difficult to continue the advance at so rapid a pace without some interval in which the Supply Services might be re-organized and the railway, everywhere destroyed by the Germans in their retreat, repaired as a line of communication.

The fighting, also, in these last few weeks had been most severe ; and although with speed we pursued the enemy, everywhere he exacted a heavy penalty for the ground gained. The Division had lost no less than 232 officers. For example, the casualties of the 1st Queen's included the Officer Commanding, the Adjutant, the Quartermaster, three Company Officers, and twenty-five Subalterns ; those of the 93rd Highlanders included the four Company Commanders, and twenty-seven Subalterns ; and those of the 1st Cameronians included two Commanding Officers and twenty-three other officers, of whom eleven had been killed.

It is no small testimony to the German troops in the field that, even in the hour of defeat, they forced us so dearly to buy victory.

On the 9th November, characteristic of the spirit of the Army, a monster sweepstake on the decision of 12 noon on the 11th was opened with an office in a deserted shop in Petit Maubeuge. Thousands of francs poured in, and the winner was a lucky private.

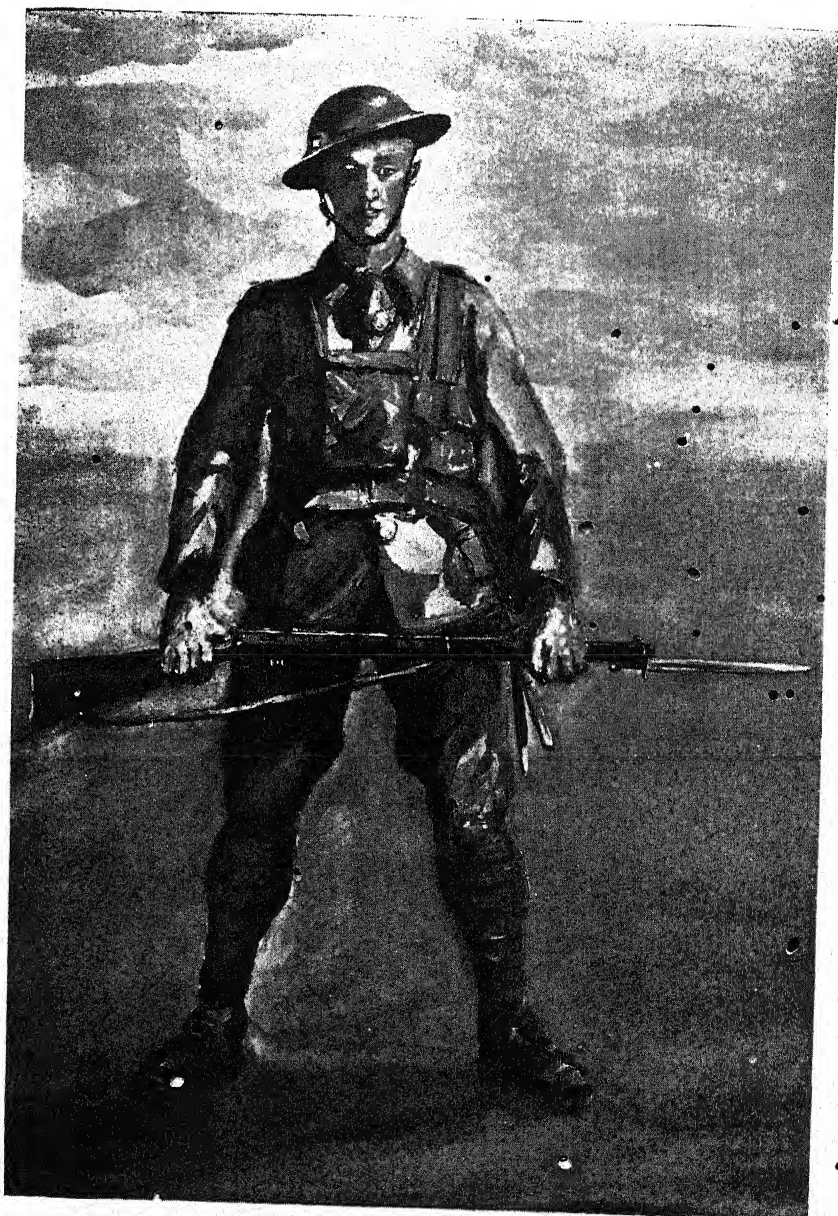
Along the front where we had our outpost lines, all was very quiet. Only did a few Germans come in with hands upraised offering themselves as prisoners. But after a little doubt as to their disposal, they were sent back to their own lines.

Promptly at the hour of eleven news came through by telegraph, by field telephone, by dispatch rider, that the Germans had accepted the terms of Armistice, the grim details of which were outlined in this first message. The War was at an end.

Such a close after four years of struggle, years for most men occupying the most impressionable of their youth, and in which, in place of an apprenticeship in trade or commerce, they had known only the business of war, struck us with mental paralysis. Men stood in small groups talking in hushed voices, appalled, dismayed. The only life which they had ever known had come to an end ; and the future opened mysteriously, offering what ? But following some hours of mental re-arrangement a boisterous spirit came to our rescue. The hour of Peace could not be let



"THE SCOUT." FORÊT DE NORMAN.
From a painting by the Author in the field.



ON THE HIGHEST PEAK OF HUMAN HISTORY WARRIOR STANDS
Drawn by the Author.

A

pass without its appropriate marking. I set my pioneers to work to make great torches to be carried on long poles, and took possession of the German Officers' Club facing the Square, opposite the Mairie, in the town of Petit Maubeuge. In the Place was piled a huge bonfire; and, failing a pyrotechnic display, as a substitute, dozens of coloured Vérey lights were thrown among the faggots and timbers. A platform leading out into the Place was arranged from the lower windows of the salon in the Officers' Club and set as a concert stage.

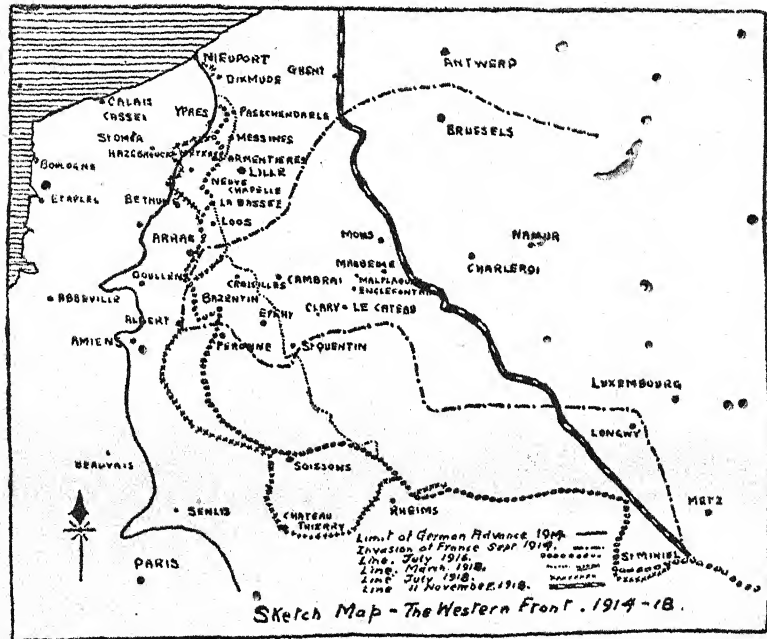
Then, as the clouds of night darkened, about 7.0 p.m., the Battalion, headed by the torch bearers and the Band, marched from its billets to the Square, collecting as it processed crowds of civilians and thousands of soldiers both from our own and the Welch Division which lay beside us. Following a few words of address, I handed the torch to the Mayor, who ignited the bonfire. Up it went with columns of smoke, dazzling the night with sparks. In a moment a roaring furnace, lighting the fronts of the houses and the skies above, stood in the centre of the Square, exploding coloured rockets with tremendous detonation and at the peril of the crowd. Indeed, so successful were the improvised fireworks that Company officers routed more from their billets to add to the fun. When furnace and fireworks were at their height, Staff officers in cars arrived to ensure lest the troops, deprived of a visit to Berlin, had recommenced some offensive of their own. The Staff joined my growing party in the German Club, but only on condition that they returned first to their own headquarters, bringing back with them food and drink suitable to such an occasion. We sang and danced until long past midnight. And that brought peace.

What of the enemies who had fought every yard of their retreat? Many must soon have stood overlooking tiny villages clad in snow, and have murmured "*Liebe heimat!*" There was a welcome for them, no less than that awaiting us.

Willkommen, Brüder! Ruhmreich, Kampferfahren
Kehrt Ihr zurück, last stolz die Fahnen weh'n!
Wir neigen uns vor Euch und vor den Scharen
Der Toten, Euch stumm zur Seite geh'n!

This volume is but a portrait of the Warrior, neither a comprehensive history of the Great War nor of any other wars. It is not a record of the contribution of any particular arm of the Service. It did not set out to paint any picture other than that of every man at war. There are histories, almost beyond count,

of units and formations, which though they marvellously detail the movements and actions of bodies of men, cannot by their very nature analyse and dissect the influences which controlled the Warriors who fought in their ranks. There are, too, memoirs and diaries of the great and of the less ; but which neither cover every phase of the Western Front, nor treat of those strategic and tactical situations which governed the physical movement and the mental attitude of the writer at the time.



Warrior has proceeded without halt from the day of the Proclamation of War to the Armistice, fighting, training, marching, playing . . . and fighting again.

Here, on the highest peak of human history, yet unafraid, Warrior stands.

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,
They fell with their faces to the foe.

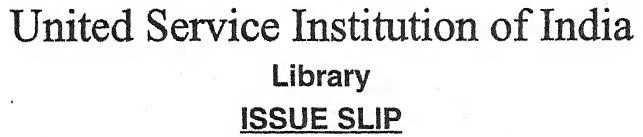
They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old :
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.¹

¹ From "For the Fallen," by Laurence Binyon

NOTE

No Index of Names is included in this volume. Those of very many Regiments—British, American, German—are included. The names of towns and villages on the Western Front, 1914 to 1918, are referred to many times; while there is frequent reference to the great captains of war, to military historians and their works. Statesmen, politicians, soldiers of the period are mentioned in every chapter. An Index, except one of the subjects reviewed, would be of little value, and would be embarrassing, also, to the size of the volume.

It is considered that the Chapter Headings are a sufficient indication as to the scope of this work; and that these will serve, also, as an efficient reference to the subject-matter discussed.



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